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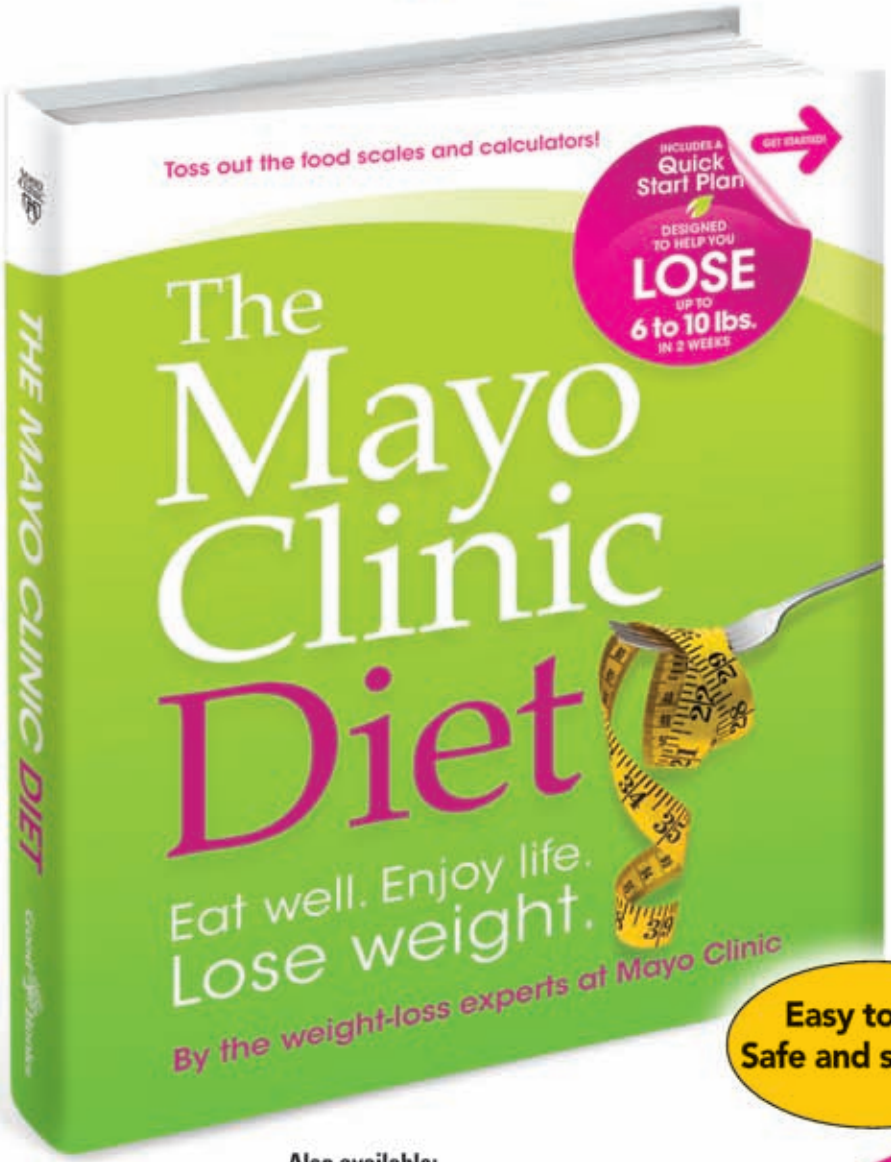
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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

VOLUME 241 WASHINGTON, MAY 13, 2010 NUMBER 4,882

Don't Be Evil

In 1981, Andrei Sakharov wrote an essay titled "The Responsibility of Scientists." His argument was that scientists, who "form the one real worldwide community which exists today," had a special obligation to speak out in defense of human rights. In part, his essay was directed to fellow Soviet scientists, whom he implored to take risks on behalf of principle—to "muster sufficient courage and integrity to resist the temptation and the habit of conformity." Yet Sakharov did not let his colleagues in the free world off the hook. "Western scientists," he wrote, "face no threat of prison or labor camp for public stands; they cannot be bribed by an offer of foreign travel to forsake such activity. But this in no way diminishes their responsibility."

Last month, an organization filled with American scientists took Sakharov's advice. The decision by Google to pull out of China—in protest of censorship and the hacking of Gmail accounts belonging to activists—was all the more remarkable because it was not the obvious move. Google may be a company of computer scientists, but it is also a commercial enterprise. Yet, perhaps for its own reasons, Google seems to have arrived at the same link that was obvious to Sakharov: the one between science and freedom. Science is empirical, collaborative across borders, rooted in the desire to ask questions—and therefore, at least in theory, inimical to dictatorship. In making this decision, Google appears to have drawn on its connection to the world of science as much as its connection to the world of money—and to have decided that it can no longer be a passive collaborator in the ugliness of Chinese repression.

Unfortunately, our political leaders seem incapable of making the same sort of stand. The Obama administration reacted to Google's announcement with reserve. Disappointment was expressed; an objection to censorship was voiced; and Americans were assured both that Obama had complained to Beijing and that "[t]he U.S.-China relationship is mature enough to sustain differences." The reaction was characteristic. It was of a piece with Hillary Clinton's statement last year that human rights could not "interfere" with other China-related issues and Obama's initial snubbing of the Dalai Lama.

It is not just a matter of our China policy. With each passing week, this administration appears less interested in human rights. In the run-up to Sudan's recent election, Obama's inept special envoy to Khartoum articulated measured confidence in the voting process—a process that almost everyone else could see was headed toward disaster. Now, in retrospect, the White House has expressed skepticism about the elections. But our envoy's pre-election comments have already helped to legitimize the preordained winner: a brutal leader who has presided over two genocides. Meanwhile, Obama recently relayed a curious sentiment to the leader of Kazakhstan, a country that Freedom House rates "not free." As Michael McFaul of the National Security Council was later quoted as saying, Obama told the dictator "that we, too, are working to improve our democracy." Given all of this, it's no wonder *The New York Times* recently observed that Obama appears to be "relegating issues like human rights and democracy to second-tier concerns"—or that one former government official was quoted in the same article describing the president's approach as "almost Kissingerian."

It is true that the consequences of this apparent indifference to human rights are far from concrete—about that much, the Kissingerian crowd is correct. Is there a single intellectual serving time in a Chinese prison who would be free if Obama were more inclined toward human rights? Perhaps not. Would Omar Al Bashir still be in power if our envoy to Sudan were more effective? Almost certainly yes. Why, then, should an American president expend precious time on human rights? It's a fair question, but it can be answered with a nod to both history and principle. For, while it is never possible to know in advance where or when these sorts of stands will yield results, we know that sometimes, over the long run, they do lead to progress. We know that human rights language in the Helsinki Accords gave dissidents a rallying cry inside the Soviet Union. We know that international isolation exacted a price on apartheid South Africa. And we know that, even when these efforts do not work out perfectly, standing with dissidents and liberals the world over is always an honorable thing for a president—especially a liberal one—to do.

"What do I expect from people in the West who sympathize with the human rights struggle?" Sakharov asked in a 1978 essay. "It is true beyond a doubt that their help is very important." He went on to explain his support for boycotts: "The Soviet Union and other totalitarian countries must know that the politics of defending human rights is not simply a beautiful phrase used by Western politicians, but an expression of the people's will in Western countries." Scientists—physicists, then; computer programmers, now—can be noble and even heroic, but they do not express the people's will. That job belongs to the president. And he ought to start doing it. ◆

Robert Neubecker

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Spin At All Costs

The pernicious comedy of Frank Luntz.

JONATHAN CHAIT

Last week, Republican pollster Frank Luntz offered himself up as a punch line in a segment for "The Daily Show." The somewhat convoluted premise of the sketch was that the show's correspondent, Samantha Bee, was helping a security consultant track down his stolen guns. For her search team, Bee assembled an ex-con, a former loan shark, and Luntz. At one point, as the three questioned the consultant's cleaning staff, the ex-shylock threatened to break their bones unless they confessed. "No no no no no," interjected Luntz. "I am very uncomfortable about you saying we're going to break their bones. Please, call it, 'enhanced interrogation techniques.'"

Luntz has slowly evolved into a fully self-aware comic figure—a kind of right-wing, establishmentarian Abbie Hoffman, exposing the moral vacuity of politics by openly conceding the total subordination of fact to spin. Yet here is the odd thing about the man: As he has developed a burgeoning career as a parody of a political consultant, he has remained an actual working political consultant, crafting messages on behalf of politicians who are not ironically self-aware and would very much like their statements to be taken seriously.

Earlier this year, Luntz penned a memo advising Republicans on how to frame their opposition to financial reform. This is the sort of problem for which Luntz is perhaps uniquely suited. Proposals to crack down on Wall Street, such as those put forward by Democrats, are popular. Luntz approached the dilemma by proposing, characteristically, to invert the truth. He advised Republicans to label financial reform as a "Big Bank Bailout bill."

In this telling, financial reform constitutes a massive subsidy to Wall Street, opposed by brave Republicans. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell closely echoed Luntz's memo in a floor speech opposing reform, which he claimed would extend "endless protection for the biggest banks on Wall Street." House Minority Leader John Boehner chimed in, "Just whose side is President Obama on?"—probably the first time the perma-tanned K Street ally had echoed the famed union anthem.

TRB
From Washington

The fully postmodern character of this argument can best be understood by recalling the broader context in which it has taken place. Before Luntz's memo, nobody had thought to question the basic fact that Wall Street considered the Democratic regulatory reforms an intrusion rather than a subsidy. Like the contention that, say, the Colts and the Saints were competing rather than colluding during the 2010 Super Bowl, it was more of an assumption universally embedded in the coverage of the events, rather than a point anybody bothered to specifically establish.

Still, a brief survey of older news stories provides a satisfactory refutation of the Dada claims made by Luntz's clients. "Mr. Obama's fight with Wall Street began last year with his proposals for greater oversight of compensation and a consumer financial protection commission," reported *The New York Times*, "[a]nd it reached a new level in his calls for policies Wall Street finds even more infuriating: a 'financial crisis responsibility' tax aimed only at the biggest banks, and a restriction on 'proprietary trading' that banks do with their own money for their own profit."

A February *Wall Street Journal* news story likewise reported, "In discussions with Wall Street executives, Republicans are striving to make the case that they are banks' best hope of preventing President Barack Obama and congressional Democrats from cracking down on Wall Street." Now, without having altered their position in the slightest, they are making the precise opposite case to the public.

Luntz burst onto the scene as a pollster for Pat Buchanan and then Ross Perot in 1992, before attaching himself to Newt Gingrich, where he rode the 1994 Republican wave, helping construct the Contract With America. Luntz's most deeply held belief was an aversion to neckware. "I will not wear a suit and tie," he boasted, and repeatedly urged his fellow partisans to follow his lead. ("[T]oo many of us are seen as suit-and-tie Republicans trying to represent a jeans-and-T-shirt electorate"; "Take off your tie, get into comfortable clothes"; and so on.)

He presented his anti-tie stance as a symbol of his unique bond with the electorate. "I don't act like a conservative in my dress or the way I speak," he said, "I don't have the half-a-million dollar beach house, even though I could." The charm of the populist lifestyle, or at least its publicity value, eventually wore thin. Luntz subsequently moved into a McLean, Virginia, mansion that society reporters described as "palatial." In 2008, he sold it for a home in Santa Monica near, yes, the beach. In many of his recent public appearances, including on his latest book cover, he sports a tie.

His most famous memo came out in 1995, after the Republicans had won control of Congress. It featured Luntz's now-familiar clear-eyed diagnosis that the public opposed the GOP's policies, alongside a blunt recommendation that the party work around this problem through deceit.

Luntz's memo addressed the GOP's goal of balancing the budget, which it had promised in his Contract With America. "The public has very limited information, their priorities are often in conflict, and nearly all government programs continue to have some constituencies," he wrote. People did not understand that balancing the budget without raising taxes would require cutting highly popular programs: "[T]he public believes overwhelmingly that the budget can be balanced just by cutting out the waste, fraud and abuse—and they expect you to find and eliminate it." The solution, he wrote, was to promise "any 'truly important' program will be maintained even while entire departments are being eliminated." In short, lie.

A 2002 memo advised Republicans on how to assuage public concerns over the environment without resorting to actual environmental protection. Addressing the question of whether carbon emissions were actually causing the atmospheric temperature to rise, he concluded, "the scientific debate [against us] is closing but not yet closed"—the consummate statement of a man who has no faith in the position he's defending.

It is the sort of statement a villain would utter in a Hollywood lefty's ham-fisted political satire. But Luntz's work is impossible to distinguish from political satire. He approaches his craft as performance art—the more absurd the position he defends, the greater the professional glory. In the financial reform fight, there is a lot of glory to be had. ◆

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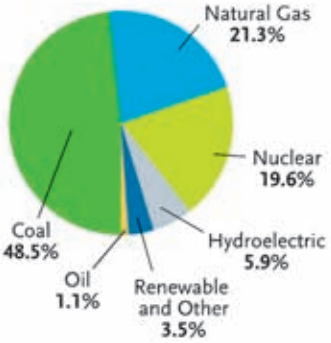

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The Mall

Pink Elephants

The strange feminism of Sarah Palin and Liz Cheney.

'Someone had better tell Washington that the pink elephant is on the move!" So crowed Sarah Palin earlier this month at a high-voltage campaign rally for Minnesota Congresswoman Michele Bachmann at the Minneapolis Convention Center. While chock-full of the liberal-bashing you'd expect from the dynamic duo, the event also had a weird strain of girl power running through it. The two women entered to country cutie Martina McBride's "This One's for the Girls," and, in introducing Palin, Bachmann gushed about how "drop-dead gorgeous" her sister-in-arms is, both inside and out. Palin, in turn, gave a shout-out to all the courageous Republican ladies fighting to save America from Democratic depravity (with a special nod to Bachmann, of course, for "leading the stampede"); invoked original tough gal Margaret Thatcher; and touted studies showing that "most" of the leaders of the Tea Party movement are women. In a call to arms worthy of EMILY's List, the former veep candidate told the cheering throngs, "2010 is shaping up to be the year that conservative women stand up to take back the country."

I don't know about taking back the country, but a certain breed of fire-breathing pink pachyderm is clearly on the rise. I mean, when you think GOP rock star, who leaps to mind? Eric Cantor? Mitch McConnell? Mitt Romney? *Michael Steele*? Please. These guys aren't exactly thrilling the masses or the commentariat. Further toward the edge of the ideological spectrum, male pols like Senator Jim DeMint and Representative Steve King may be fighting the right's fight, but they're nowhere close to becoming household names, much less cultural icons. Instead, it's pugilistic lasses Palin, Bachmann, and, increasingly, Liz Cheney who are channeling—and fueling—the passions of the base with their in-your-face conservatism.

On one level, I find this trend disturbing. On another, I cannot help but be impressed by—and even a bit grateful to—these conservative girls gone wild. Say what you will about their ideology; these angry female fringe-dwellers are arguably doing more than anyone to tear down some of the most tiresome stereotypes about women in politics.

Sarah Palin's lies and truculence debunk stereotypes.

You know what I'm talking about: Every few years someone writes a book, publishes a study, or simply drops a quote suggesting what a kinder, gentler, less competitive, more collaborative, less power-crazed, and fundamentally more ethical place Washington would be if only the gals were in charge. When I was examining this bit of conventional wisdom several years ago, one of my favorite quotes was an admonition from Democratic Senator Barbara Mikulski to Republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison: "Civility must start with us." Former Clinton press secretary Dee Dee Myers pursued a related theme in her 2008 book, *Why Women Should Rule the World*. (Sample observation by Myers: "Women tend to be better communicators, better listeners, better at forming consensus.") And, in 2006, then–Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Chairman Rahm Emanuel giddily predicted to *The New York Times* that scandal-weary voters would sweep a wave of his party's female candidates into Congress because women represented "clean and change." It's difference feminism Beltway style, with a high-minded, virtuous sisterhood bringing conciliation, empathy, and an almost maternal tenderness to the masculine blood sport of U.S. politics.

As gross generalizations go, this is, perhaps, more flattering than the one about women being too soft-hearted and weak-kneed to lead. But it's still largely B.S. Of course there are differences between the sexes. But women who make it to the top of the political heap arrive with their own glut of ambition, toughness, and arrogance. Mikulski, it bears noting, has been repeatedly voted "meanest" senator in *Washingtonian* magazine's annual survey of Hill staffers. And, for those who believe political gals are inherently more easygoing, conciliatory, or forgiving than their male counterparts, I have two words: Hillary Clinton. Two more: Nancy Pelosi.

MATTHEW HEALEY/UPI/LANDOV

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As more women come to power, the stereotypes are fading. But the process can be maddeningly slow and, more often than not, undramatic. Which is why it's so electrifying when figures like Palin, Bachmann, and Cheney emerge from the pack to drive the point home. Forget civility and compromise: These ladies stand out for their ability to rant, rave, name-call, finger-point, and peddle the most outrageous distortions in service to their cause. (Death panels anyone?) And none seems burdened by the reluctance to self-promote that so often undermines professional women. Thus far, Cheney is the most reserved of the three. But her politics are just as hard-edged, her partisan attacks are just as vicious, and, in her current incarnation as a TV pundit / candidate-in-training, she has a reputation both for combativeness and for not letting anyone else get a word in edgewise. Talk about your male stereotypes.

It makes perfect sense that hard-right firebrands are commanding center stage in today's Republican Party. Among Obama-era conservatives, rage is all the rage. But what is it that makes bellicose conservative women in particular so popular? Part of it may be novelty. Confronting a still male-dominated punditocracy, the chat shows are hungry for guests who can break up the parade of boring old white guys in somber suits. Mouthy, telegenic women are like catnip for bookers. More elementally, sex may factor into the equation as well. In 2008, many speculated that Palin's higher favorables among men had at least a little to do with the fact that Republican guys (including pointy-headed analysts) could not stop talking about how hot she was. Nothing inflames like a beauty queen with a gun.

Admittedly, a pro-life, anti-gay-marriage, creationist beauty queen ranting about death panels is not exactly the feminist ideal. And neither Palin nor Bachmann nor Cheney is likely to wind up on NOW's list of favored candidates. Still, simply by being themselves—truculent, arrogant, awful—these women give the lie to lingering stereotypes that ultimately serve no one well. Somewhere, Betty Friedan may not be smiling exactly. But she's almost certainly intrigued.

Michelle Cottle

Ghosts

Could the Polish plane crash bury Stalinism forever?

The event known as Katyn began when the Red Army invaded Poland, along with the Wehrmacht, in September 1939. The Soviets took thousands of Polish officers prisoner and held them in the ruins of Orthodox monasteries. When these men were allowed to leave the camps 70 years ago, in April 1940, they expected that they would be returning home. Instead, they were taken to Kharkiv or Tver or Katyn. Over the course of a few days, 21,892 of these prisoners were shot in the base of the skull. The executioners were NKVD men, state policemen acting on the order of Stalin. One of them later recalled: "There was a clack, and that was the end."

Katyn was part of a pattern of Soviet policies directed against the Polish nation. For ten years, Poles within the Soviet Union had been targets of particular repression. In 1930, as the Soviet state began to take control of agriculture—"collectivization"—Poles were the first subjects of Soviet ethnic cleansing. They were dispatched from the western Soviet Union to Kazakhstan, where they died in the thousands as collectivization produced famine. Tens of thousands more Poles died in Stalin's deliberate starvation of Ukraine in 1932 and 1933. During Stalin's Great Terror of 1937–1938, more than 100,000 people were shot as putative spies for Poland. The baseless rationale for these mass executions was that Poland was planning an aggressive war against the Soviet Union as an ally of Germany. But, of course, it was Stalin who allied with Hitler in 1939, allowing World War II to begin with their joint invasion of Poland. The Polish officers killed by the NKVD in Katyn had been fighting Nazi Germany.

While the Soviets held the Polish officers in custody, they permitted the men to write their families—so that the NKVD could collect addresses. After their executions, their families were deported to the taiga of Siberia or the steppe of Kazakhstan, where many thousands of them died. They were among the more than 300,000 Polish citizens deported by the Soviets during the first two years of World War II.

Katyn was the beginning of a regime of lies that prevailed in Poland for five decades. After Hitler betrayed Stalin and the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, Poland and the Soviet Union became uneasy allies. Stalin released men from the Gulag and allowed them to fight in the west. (One of these was Ryszard Kaczorowski, who died in the April 10 plane crash near Smolensk that killed 96 people, including Polish President Lech Kaczyński. Kaczorowski took part in the courageous charges on Monte Cassino in the Italian campaign.) But the Polish government-in-exile noticed that thousands of officers were missing. The Soviets denied all knowledge of their fate. When the Germans uncovered the NKVD shooting site at Katyn in April 1943, Stalin used the occasion to break diplomatic relations with the Polish government. If Poland did not accept the Soviet lie that this was a German crime, Poles would have no chance to negotiate with Stalin over the future of Poland's eastern lands. Washington and London urged the Poles to accept the untruth.

Once the Soviets defeated the Germans and installed a communist government in postwar Poland, the lie about Katyn became the official history. The notion that the Germans rather than the Soviets had committed the crime was part of a larger story of the war, embraced in the communist world and also in the West, according to which the one aggressor and occupier had been Nazi Germany. The lie about Katyn was not only the propaganda keystone of communist control of Poland, it was essential to an entire scheme of history in which Soviet forces were liberators and nothing more.

After the war, Katyn was the main entry in the unwritten encyclopedia of Polish history that circulated during the decades of communism. More perhaps than any other event, Katyn generated the desire for what many in the Solidarity movement of the 1980s called truth. Many of the Polish dignitaries who died in the plane crash near Smolensk were heirs of Solidarity, and they were traveling to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of a crime whose history they have instead joined.

IN MEMORY OF TOMASZ MERTA (1965-2010)

Anna Walentynowicz, who died in the crash, was a welder and crane operator at a shipyard in Gdańsk in communist Poland in the 1970s. She was fired in August 1980, a few months short of the time when she would have been eligible for her pension. Her colleagues protested, beginning the shipyard strike that soon spread throughout the country. The Solidarity movement, born then, was a joint creation of workers and intellectuals, such as the young lawyer Lech Kaczyński. Along with his brother Jarosław, he was a close adviser

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to Lech Wałęsa, the leader of the Solidarity movement. He was still among its chief organizers in the late 1980s, when Solidarity seized the opportunity provided by Gorbachev for peaceful and democratic change.

During the decade that followed communism, the former Solidarity advisers divided among themselves and founded political parties. Lech Kaczyński was among those most concerned to make a clear break with the communist past and bring to light the truth about Polish history. Elected mayor of Warsaw in 2002, he oversaw the construction of a museum of the Warsaw uprising, the struggle of the Polish Home Army against the German occupation of the capital. Elected president in 2005, he conducted a foreign policy that bordered on the self-righteous. He was often called a "nationalist," but this does not quite meet the case. He was a kind of provincial universalist. He did not know foreign languages or much about the outside world, but he did believe that all nations needed to learn their own past and that truth was the key to international reconciliation. As president, he was oversensitive and ineffective—but also stubbornly principled and entirely uncorrupt. When he embarked for Russia, he was seeking reconciliation on the basis of the truth about Katyn which Moscow itself has finally recognized.

The plane crash raised fears that, once again, the Polish nation had been decapitated.

In the era of Vladimir Putin, Russia's official position about the crimes of Stalinism has been, more or less, "This is our history, we were the victims, and so, we must be the judges." This is not quite right, and, after the crash, this position will be harder to maintain. Russians suffered enormously under Stalin, but they suffered less than the peoples of the Soviet periphery: Kazakhs, Ukrainians, Chechens, Poles. Consider the Great Terror in Leningrad, which prompted the most memorable poem of the Russian twentieth century, Anna Akhmatova's "Requiem." Akhmatova recalled an "innocent Russia" writhing "beneath the bloody boots of the executioners, beneath the wheels of the black marias." Innocent Russia was a multinational country, and Poles in her city were more than 30 times as likely to be shot as Russians.

The death of Lech Kaczyński in Russia may begin a new Russian reckoning with Stalinism. Putin had already marked the change of course by agreeing to honor the anniversary of the Katyn massacre. By portraying Katyn as a crime committed by the Stalinist regime rather than the Russian people, he has drawn a line between Soviet and Russian politics: a distinction he had previously been reluctant to make. And he reacted to the plane crash by choosing to call even more attention to the Katyn murders. Russian television broadcast a stirring film about Katyn by the Polish director Andrzej Wajda. President Dmitri Medvedev declared a national day of mourning. Ordinary Russians appeared with flowers, candles, and icons at the Polish embassy in Moscow and at the crash site near Smolensk. One Russian left a card asking for forgiveness for Katyn. Another left a line from a poem by the Polish poet Jan Twardowski: "Let us hurry to love people, they leave us so quickly."

Russians are right to recall that the forests of Smolensk have seen other tragedies, and on a greater scale. Smolensk is the site of the last important battle the Wehrmacht won on its way to Moscow. One million Soviet soldiers died defending their capital city. Smolensk marks the outer reach of the Holocaust by bullets, whereby the Germans killed Jews in the east. By the time they revealed the burial site at Katyn, the Germans had left behind thousands of death pits of their own, full of the corpses of murdered Jews. Each of these events has its own scale, its own specific horrors. The particular cruelty of Katyn was the attempt to exterminate the intellectual leadership of a nation. These Polish officers were usually reserve officers, which meant they were men with university degrees. Among the victims at Katyn were botanists, agronomists, neurologists, lawyers, engineers, surgeons, poets. This is one of the reasons why the Smolensk crash so pains Poles. It appears that, once again, the nation has been decapitated.

But this Polish elite, unlike any for two centuries, has left a healthy state and society to those who will follow. Although each of the victims is now missed and mourned, Polish politics can and will proceed without them. The truth about Katyn has now been accepted in Moscow and conveyed around the world. But, as Russian commentators have pointed out, no Russian politician has attended to the Russian victims of Stalinism the way that Kaczyński and others on that plane concerned themselves with its Polish victims. Putin and Medvedev now have an opening. They can guide Russia away from an official nostalgia for Stalin. Poles can help by recognizing and acknowledging that Katyn, despite its particular trauma for the

Tomasz Walenta

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Polish nation, is but one of the crimes of the Stalinist era. The experience of Stalinism is, sadly, what Poles and Russians share. With these terrible deaths comes an opportunity to make better sense of a bitter past. TIMOTHY SNYDER

Timothy Snyder is a professor of history at Yale University and a fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. His most recent book is THE RED PRINCE: THE SECRET LIVES OF A HABSBURG ARCHDUKE. *His next book,* BLOODLANDS: EUROPE BETWEEN HITLER AND STALIN, *will be published in October.*

L'Affaire to Remember

When a tryst is too much . . . even for the French.

PARIS

THE IMPISH HEADLINES in *Le Canard enchaîné*, the satirical weekly that happens to be the most informative newspaper in France, rarely translate well. An exception might be the recent front-page lead: "SARKO EST D'UNE RUMEUR MASSACRANTE." This play on the expression *être d'une humeur massacrante*—roughly, "angry enough to kill"—concerns the distemper of Nicolas Sarkozy over a certain *rumeur massacrante* ("foul rumor") swirling around the French president's two-year marriage to former supermodel Carla Bruni. Born on Twitter and brought to global attention by a blog on the site of a French weekly, the tidbit about the first couple's respective conjugal infidelities has come to dominate French politics. The rumor-about-the-affairs scandal even gets its own playful handle, *l'affaire de la rumeur*.

The facts of the gossip, such as they are, are largely irrelevant, though we can get to them shortly. The spark matters less than the fire. Barring a turnaround of the type this political talent is indubitably capable of pulling off, the Sarkozy era in France looks, for most purposes, to be over. Rumorgate is the quintessence of this president's fatal flaws—a wandering eye, in fact, not foremost among them. His five-year term runs until 2012, but his sagging standing crimps his ability or desire to mount his promised revolution.

First, however, let's sort through the silliness. On March 9, a certain Mikl07 posted a blog item on the site of the *Journal du Dimanche*, a Sunday newspaper, that elaborated on a series of tweets from previous weeks: "Breaking News! After Haiti, Chili and then Turkey, we understand that the Elyseé [Palace, the French White House] has been hit by an earthquake measuring nine on the Richter scale." It continued to say that Bruni was having an affair with pop star Benjamin Biolay, while the president, in turn, was cheating on her with his ecology minister, Chantal Jouanno, a former karate champion. The post disappeared a few hours later, replaced by a note from management that it was suppressed "due to the seriously detrimental nature of the remarks to private lives."

Of course, nothing can ever be truly erased from the Web. Soon, the *Sun* in the U.K. ran with the story, as did outlets in Switzerland, Germany, and the United States. French media stayed mostly mum. The state-run international cable-news channel, France 24, did dare mention the allegations in a press review that cited foreign media. Biolay sued the channel for 20,000 euros, calling the report "inexact." He won the case and 3,000 euros in damages. Now, the French press refers to the rumor without repeating it, assuming—no doubt correctly—that the French are familiar with the details through the Internet or by word of mouth.

The Élysée at first declined to comment. But the president isn't known for his restraint. As the story refused to die, his men began to obsess about cabals and conspiracies. Thierry Herzog, the president's lawyer, came out to blame "machinations . . . either by agencies or by individuals who wish to destabilize the Sarkozy couple." Brice Hortefeux, no less than the minister of interior, in the *Canard,* cited a "possible plot" by foreign powers to destabilize France itself.

This being France, the organs of the state were mobilized. The counterespionage agency, DCRI, was asked by the president's office to investigate the source and subsequent spread of the rumor. Last month, *Journal du Dimanche* filed a complaint with the courts about "fraudulent introduction of data" onto its site. The paper also asked a 23-year-old journalist who worked on its website to resign, blaming him for the original post. *Journal du Dimanche* is owned by an industrial scion close to the president, Arnaud Lagardère. Everyone assumes the paper acted, ultimately, at the president's behest to file the criminal complaint. Back in 2006, Lagardère fired the editor of another of his publications, *Paris Match*, after Sarkozy went ballistic over published pictures, including one on the magazine's cover, of his then-wife, Cécilia, in New York with her lover Richard Attias, who is now her husband. All clear? Much of the French press is owned by rich friends of the president. So, out of fear for their jobs, as well as traditional deference to the Élysée, editors and reporters don't pry too deeply into Sarko's intimate affairs.

In a soap opera with many twists, there's a subplot starring Rachida Dati that stands out. Born to Muslim parents, she was once the face of a changed France in the Sarkozy cabinet, a presidential confidante, and, it is reputed, one-time paramour. They fell out, Dati lost her job as minister of justice, and, last June, she went into exile as a member of the European Parliament

Will rumors about Sarkozy's sex life bring him down?

DAVID COWLES

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in Brussels. The other day, according to my sources, she got a call in her government-issued Peugeot 607, staffed with bodyguards and a driver. It was the Élysée, convinced Dati was behind the leaking of the story of the double cheating, which she denies. As punishment, the car and security detail were pulled from her. In tears, she called a friend to send a car to pick her up. The story of her bullying got wide circulation—*Canard* headline: "Rachida's 607 turns on a state affair."

The Sarkozy marriage isn't the story, really. Per stereotype, the French are tolerant to a point, expecting no better from their leaders than they do from themselves. While they'll consume tabloid fare and turn a book about the sex lives of politicians into a huge best seller (as happened a few years back), they also value discretion and decorum in their presidents—the last adjectives anyone would associate with the incumbent at the Élysée. For a while, it didn't matter that Sarkozy doesn't look like a French president, as a TV commentator once said. He represented a "rupture" with the doldrums of the Jacques Chirac era. He was full of energy, willing to break taboos and make grand promises.

The bigger rupture has turned out to be between him and the electorate. That happened quickly, too. By May 2008, he was down 32 points in the polls from ten months earlier. His approval ratings hit new lows—28 percent in a poll this month. And two-thirds don't want him to stand for reelection. Last month, the Socialists swept the right in regional elections. The French don't much like him. He responds: "I'm not there to be loved or not loved; I'm there to do." Ahh, if only. Few politicians crave that love as transparently as Sarkozy. And it is personal. His job performance isn't bad. France weathered the economic crisis better than any other big European economy. He implemented some reforms, stalled on others, and, lately, swerved from right to left, and back again. The biggest policy knock on him is incoherence. As the editor of the center-left *Le Monde*, Eric Fottorino, recently wrote: "Suddenly the Sarkozy method, the permanent agitation, has created a deadlock as strong as the immobility that he reproached, often very hard, his predecessor for." But, far more than his ideas or policies, the French today find his antics tiresome.

L'affaire de la rumeur is merely the latest eruption of unhinged presidential neurosis in response to a perceived personal slight. There was, in February 2008, *l'affaire du SMS.* Sarkozy filed a criminal complaint against *Le Nouvel Observateur* for publishing an alleged text message he sent to his former wife, Cécilia, on the eve of his wedding to Carla. "If you come back, I cancel everything," he was said to have written. The suit was withdrawn after the magazine apologized. Before then, Sarkozy pursued his rival, former Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, through the courts for allegedly smearing his name. This January, on Sarkozy's birthday, the courts finally cleared de Villepin. The case helped launch a political comeback by turning the haughty aristocrat into a sympathetic figure, a victim of Sarkozy's paranoia.

Among the president's friends, the root causes of his troubles are debated. *Canard* found young ministers who blame his immediate entourage. "No one tells the President the truth," one told the paper. Others date the rot back to 2007, when Cécilia, a political adviser, left him for good; within weeks, his poll numbers tumbled. In the days after, he was obviously lonely, distracted from his job. Bachelor life lasted but a couple months. "A man who can't live without a woman," one of his bodyguards once told me. Carla has brought in her own fashion-set crowd and pushed conventionally Euro-left views onto him. "He's a shell of his former self," says one friend. "I can't imagine him hanging on in 2012."

Potential presidential candidates from the French Socialists, arguably the most unreconstructed mainstream left-wing party in Western Europe, outpoll Sarkozy. And who knows if he'll even get the chance to run. Smelling a loser, his own Union for a Popular Movement is having second thoughts. Maybe the old ways weren't so bad, whisper the party's parliamentarians. A former education minister and celebrity philosopher, Luc Ferry, recently urged Sarkozy to "embrace Gaullism," the very philosophy the president moved to disavow. The most Gaullist of current politicians, de Villepin, plans to start a new party in June. The prototypical French functionary this month went to milk cows at a farm, which is akin to an American pol telegraphing presidential aspirations by dropping by a fair in Iowa. Other Sarkozy rivals potentially include his own prime minister, François Fillon, who has a much higher approval rating than the president.

The demise of Sarkozy would bring to an end a heady period in French politics. He opened France to the United States in a way no previous president would; last year, the French rejoined NATO's military command, 43 years after Charles de Gaulle yanked them out. Though he has always possessed a statist streak, early in his term, Sarkozy did try to remove the stigma attached to capitalism, a legacy of an agrarian society that came relatively late to the industrial age. As the first leader born after World War II, Sarkozy was unsaddled with the complexes his predecessors took from the double humiliation of German occupation and American liberation. He is also part Jewish, part Hungarian—by name and appearance, a different sort of leader, and unattached to Gaullist insecurity disguised as national grandeur. But his tempestuous temperament, once a strength, has become his undoing. François Mitterrand, the only Socialist president of the Fifth Republic, once said of his successor Jacques Chirac that "he lacks inner peace and perhaps as well real character." Sarkozy has just two years to prevent that from being his epitaph as well.

Matthew Kaminski

Matthew Kaminski is a member of the Wall Street Journal's editorial board.

The Trial

An imprisoned grad student tests our alliance with India.

In December 2005, a Purdue graduate student named Vikram Buddhi began posting a series of ugly notes—"Kill GW Bush," "Rape And Kill Laura Bush," "Kill Donald Rumsfeld The Old Geezer Crook"—on a message board devoted to technology. A few months later, Buddhi, an Indian citizen who was in the United States to study math, was arrested and charged with threatening the life of the president—a federal crime. He was convicted in June 2007 and, this past December, sentenced to nearly five years in prison.

I had never heard of Buddhi until a recent trip to India, but his story has attracted attention there. Many of the country's major newspapers have carried investigative stories about the case, as has NDTV, one of India's largest TV stations. In 2009, after the channel aired an interview with Buddhi from prison in Chicago, the reporter signed off by saying that Buddhi's "American dream had become a nightmare." Shortly after Buddhi's sentencing, ten protesters hurled rolled-up flyers at the U.S. consul general in Mumbai during a press conference.

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[1] *Bossier Press-Tribune*, March 30, 2010.

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Buddhi's imprisonment, the flyers said, was a "warning to all Indian youth who are committed to redeeming their land from the forces of U.S. imperialism."

Leading the charge on behalf of Buddhi has been his father, Buddhi Subbarao, a prominent gadfly who is revered within certain quarters of the Indian elite for his willingness to question the government, and who was an outspoken opponent of the recent nuclear deal between India and the United States. When I met him last month in the lobby of the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, he spun an elaborate theory about the case. The U.S. Secret Service, he said, concluded that his son posed no serious threat when it initially investigated him in early 2006. But, between the time of that investigation and his son's arrest in April, Subbarao published a technical article criticizing the nuclear deal. "On what basis was he arrested on April 14?" Subbarao asks me. "Is there a new development? The only new development is an article written by me."

There is no evidence to support Subbarao's claim; and, while plenty of Indians seem to believe that Buddhi was treated unfairly by the U.S. justice system, I doubt many share his father's darkly conspiratorial view of the case. Moreover, the Buddhi saga was hardly an earth-shattering development in U.S.-India relations. Still, the entire episode is a reminder that Indians' feelings about the United States are somewhat more complex than we often assume. Americans tend to think of India as a natural ally. The two countries share a common language (English), a common enemy (jihadism), a common rival (China), and a strong trade relationship. And, on the surface at least, the United States is well-liked in India. In 2009, the Pew Research Center found that 76 percent of Indians viewed the United States favorably—making it more popular in India than in Canada, Britain, or Israel.

Yet, for all these outward signs of comity, the relationship is not without its share of friction. These days, much of that friction traces to the nuclear deal that so exorcised Buddhi's father. The agreement—which offered India cooperation on civil nuclear power but would likely be imperiled if the country ever conducted another nuclear weapons test—was seen by many nonproliferation advocates in the United States as overly generous to India, since it extended benefits to a nation that had never signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. But, in India, the deal was viewed by its many critics as a blow to national pride. It was opposed not just by the country's nuclear establishment and the major conservative opposition party, but also by some of the left-leaning parties that made up the governing coalition of the prime minister, Manmohan Singh. (The controversy surrounding the deal sparked a no-confidence vote in India's parliament, which Singh barely survived.)

Teresita Schaffer, author of *India and the United States in the 21st Century* and director of the South Asia Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, traces this opposition to a tradition of "strategic autonomy" in Indian foreign policy. During the cold war, India was the leader of the nonaligned movement; now, Schaffer explains, many Indian elites continue to believe that India should "not allow powerful countries to influence its foreign policy." *The Times of India*'s Mumbai bureau chief, Subramani Balakrishnan, put it this way last month, to a small group of reporters (we were all in India on a trip sponsored by the East-West Center): The nuclear deal, he said, "has the effect of tying India to a chair."

Washington's close relationship with Pakistan is also a source of irritation for much of India's political class. While the left has historically worried about U.S. imperialism, says C. Raja Mohan, the strategic affairs editor of the *Indian Express* (and a supporter of the nuclear deal), the right has generally worried about Washington's support for Pakistan and, beginning in the 1970s, its ties to China. "Historically in India there is deep distrust of the United States, both on the left and the right," he says.

All this tension is not without practical consequences. Singh is currently taking heat at home from the right-wing Hindu nationalist opposition for bowing to U.S. pressure by considering renewed talks with Pakistan over the status of Kashmir. Meanwhile, Washington needs India's help if economic sanctions against Iran are to work, but so far, that help has not been forthcoming. "We don't think sanctions really achieve their objective," Singh said at the recent nuclear summit in Washington. At a broader level, the United States needs India to be a stable cornerstone of an international system that can fight terrorism, proliferation, and other transnational threats. If Indian elites believe the United States is out to manipulate its sovereignty or aid its chief enemy, Pakistan, this will undoubtedly lead to problems down the road.

Paul Folmsbee, the U.S. consul general in Mumbai who was harassed by pro-Buddhi protesters at a press conference, is optimistic for the long term. "On the margins, there is friction," he says. "But we are locked into a good relationship because we have shared values." And that is mostly true. Except every once in a while, when a nuclear deal or an imprisoned grad student reminds everyone that the picture is a bit more complicated.

Eli Lake

Kaboom!

The rock that will remake global politics.

George Mitchell, a longtime Houston wildcatter, worked for about two decades on a hunch that he could crack open enormous volumes of gas thought to be hopelessly locked into shale rock underneath Denton County, Texas. By 2002, the then-octogenarian Mitchell succeeded and, as a result, created a massive global energy boom. Mitchell's technique uses horizontal drilling to fracture shale thousands of feet underground and then injects the cracks with a high-pressure mixture of chemical- and sand-laced water, releasing trapped gas. Fracking, as experts call it, has doubled estimated North American natural gas reserves to three quadrillion cubic feet—the rough equivalent of 500 billion barrels of oil, or almost double Saudi Arabia's crude inventory, according to Cambridge Energy Research Associates. Suddenly, the United States is said to have a 100-year supply of natural gas, and the fuel is already flowing out of Texas and Louisiana.

So powerful is the shale-gas boom that it's challenging the assumptions underlying economic and political strategies in the United States and around the world: It's undercutting the feared designs of Russia's Gazprom, and it also seems likely to shake up the calculus in China and the Middle East, whose oil revenue could be in jeopardy. Closer to home, the fuel has overturned energy politics in Washington and threatened the feasibility of the so-called Sarah Palin Pipeline, a proposed natural-gas line connecting Alaska to the lower 48 states. The gas has also wholly changed the mood of the energy industry, which is audibly giddy after years of gloom over the rise of rival, petrostate-run oil companies and talk of "peak oil." Now, almost every major oil company is spending billions to buy up shale-gas acreage in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere.

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[1] J. Hansen et al. "Current GISS Global Surface Temperature Analysis." NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies (March 18, 2010). [2] J. E. Box et al. Arctic Report Card: Greenland. Internet. http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/reportcard/greenland.html (October 19, 2009). [3] Velicogna, I. "Increasing rates of ice mass loss from the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets revealed by GRACE." Geophysical Research Letters 36 (2009). [4] I. Allison et al. The Copenhagen Diagnosis. Internet. http://download.copenhagendiagnosis.org/ (2009). [5] "Human Impacts on Climate." American Geophysical Union. Internet. http://www.agu.org/sci_pol/positions/climate_change2008.shtml (2007).

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The words most often used by the heads of oil companies to describe the boom are "revolution" and "game changer." Industry historian Daniel Yergin calls it "the shale gale." Admittedly, serious questions remain as to whether shale gas will pass the ecological test—critics say it can't be extracted safely in proximity to groundwater, and the EPA is engaged in a two-year study of extraction techniques. But, if producers can develop it on a global scale, we may be looking at a geopolitical disturbance as great as the 1970s Arab oil embargoes.

As it stands, the projected growth in global oil demand over the coming decades—and, therefore, the fiscal wherewithal of Venezuela, Iran, and the rest of the Middle East—relies largely on Asia's roaring economy, because U.S. and European consumption is dropping as Western consumers react to higher prices by conserving more. Specifically, the increase rests on an anticipated surge in Chinese and Indian demand for cars. But, if their oil demand does not materialize as expected—if, for example, those future Chinese and Indian motorists drive fewer gasoline-fueled cars and more plug-in hybrids and electric vehicles recharged by natural-gas-fired power plants—that increase will be much smaller, or could even evaporate.

A surge in gas supplies would facilitate that switch, and experts say signs of such a shift are already under way. Beijing has said that it intends to satisfy more of its swelling electricity needs with natural-gas-fired plants and that its consumers will become the world's largest group of buyers of electric cars and hybrids. Meanwhile, liquid natural gas (LNG) from Australia and Qatar—and possibly Alaska—that has been largely locked out of the United States by the domestic shale-gas glut is being aimed at the Chinese market. In addition, China itself has indigenous shale gas estimated at as much as 7.5 billion barrels of oil.

Lower Chinese oil demand would add to a challenge already posed by a surge of six million barrels per day of new crude-oil supplies expected from Iraq in the next seven or so years, which PFC Energy, a Washington-based consulting firm, forecasts will contribute to a long-term surplus of global oil. Oil surpluses mean lower prices, which could lead the petrostates—never a harmonious bunch—into a debilitating price war. "If they really start fighting in a diminishing-demand environment, prices could go straight down to twenty to thirty dollars a barrel," says Fareed Mohamedi, PFC Energy's head of country strategies. Oil is currently selling above $80 per barrel.

The results of the last energy-driven disruptions—the 1973 Arab oil embargo and the 1979 Iranian revolution—were a shift of much economic wealth to the Middle East and the bankrolling of the oil-rich Soviet Union for an additional decade, forestalling its eventual 1991 collapse. In this century, an oil-price spiral fueled the rise of Vladimir Putin's full-throated Russia.

The gas age could well reverse those geopolitical shifts; $35-per-barrel or even $50-per-barrel oil would change the landscape for Russia, as well as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), stripping away the disposable income to which they have become accustomed and subjecting them to political instability.

For example, low oil prices could finally force Putin's Russia to address its considerable internal economic problems and diversify its economy. (There is evidence of such a shift in the Kremlin's recent announcement of a $200 million plan to build its own Silicon Valley—a tech-savvy city outside Moscow for cutting-edge innovation.) And the increased gas supply could reduce Russia's strategic leverage abroad. Already, because of the new American gas glut, Qatari LNG originally meant for the United States is being diverted to Europe at discount prices. That has undermined Gazprom, which controls a quarter of the European gas market and, in recent years, has terrified countries—such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia—by temporarily shutting off pipelines that supply them. The threat to Gazprom's European gas demand, in turn, has cast doubt on Russia's state-dominated economic model, which is largely dependent on Gazprom revenue, and also on the company's continued ability to serve as a spear point of Russian foreign policy. Over the last four years, Russia has cut Ukraine's gas supply three times in what's perceived locally as an attempt to demonstrate continued power over the former Soviet bloc.

For its part, the Saudi royal family depends on cash payments to ultra-fundamentalist local and regional Islamic groups, in some measure, for political survival. The Saudis also make such payments to outside militant groups as part of a policy of spreading the Kingdom's influence throughout the Muslim world—a strategy that may no longer be possible in an era of rock-bottom oil prices. The Saudis "would have to think about where their interests really are long term," says Charles K. Ebinger, director of the Energy Security Initiative at the Brookings Institution.

Other OPEC countries would be in even bigger trouble. Venezuela and Iran, for instance, are already stretched economically. With sub–$50-per-barrel oil, both could face a "devastating" financial squeeze, said Kenneth B. Medlock, who runs the natural-gas program at Rice University's James A. Baker III Institute. The world's most belligerent petrostates tend to speak more softly on the international stage when oil prices drop, and "Iran would change its posture toward the rest of the world," becoming more conciliatory, Medlock says. Venezuela's Hugo Chavez is already decidedly more friendly toward Western firms—in early April, he agreed to new terms in a gas extraction contract with Chevron, for instance.

Of course, there are factors that could undercut the drama wrought by shale gas: A meaningful shift in U.S. or Chinese electrification will take not years, but decades; and, in the same way that shale gas arrived without warning, another wholly unexpected discovery or event could shake up everything anew. Still, the current trend points to a time dominated by natural gas.

Washington has only begun to consider the economic impact of shale gas, and policy circles appear not to have registered the geopolitical ramifications at all. Yet, at once, some of the country's most intractable problems may become much less so. If federal policy encourages the wholesale shift from coal- to natural gas-fired power plants, the United States could rapidly cut global greenhouse-gas emissions. Abroad, the United States could face a fundamentally different landscape in the Middle East, in which there is far less cash to foment mischief, and a weakened or even reformed Russia. But this change will be destabilizing in its own ways. The gas age could help unravel many maddeningly problematic knots, but Washington needs to grasp what's coming and anticipate the landscape it will encounter.

Steve LeVine

Steve LeVine, a Washington-based writer on energy and foreign affairs, is the author of The Oil and the Glory.

ANTHONY RUSSO

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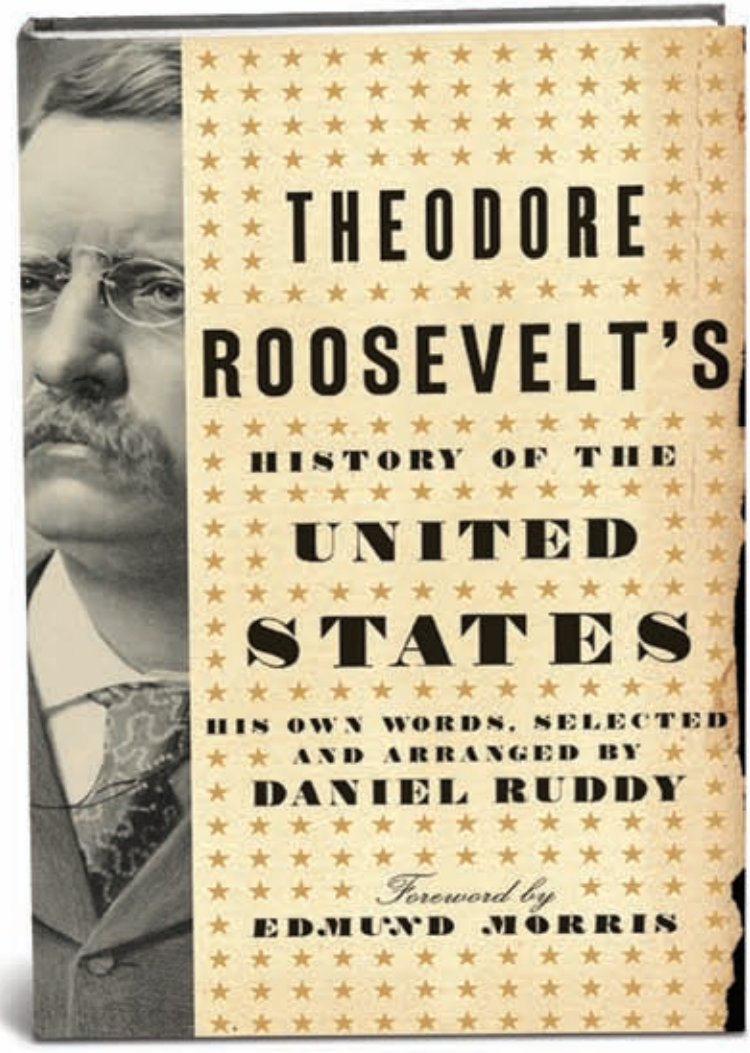

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Human Rights Watch fights a civil war over Israel.

BENJAMIN BIRNBAUM

On October 19 of last year, the op-ed page of *The New York Times* contained a bombshell: a piece by Robert Bernstein, the founder and former chairman of Human Rights Watch (HRW), attacking his own organization. HRW, Bernstein wrote, was "helping those who wish to turn Israel into a pariah state." The allegation was certainly not new: HRW had been under assault for years by American Jews and other supporters of Israel, who argued that it was biased against the Jewish state. And these attacks had intensified in recent months, with a number of unflattering revelations about the organization. In July, HRW found itself under fire when a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed noted that the organization had solicited donations in Saudi Arabia by trumpeting the criticism it faces from "pro-Israel pressure groups." In August, the blogosphere leapt on one of the organization's top Middle East officials for having once been part of a team that edited a radical anti-Israel journal. And, in September, HRW suspended one of the primary contributors to its reports on the wars in Gaza and Lebanon after his private hobby—collecting Nazi memorabilia—became public.

Still, to most readers of the *Times* last October, even those who closely followed debates over Israel, Bernstein's piece would have seemed odd: It isn't every day that the founder of a group turns so publicly on his own creation. What few people outside HRW knew, however, was that Bernstein's op-ed was the culmination of a long struggle inside the organization that had turned increasingly acrimonious over the years. The debate revolved around a single question: Was the world's most respected human rights group being fair to Israel? Bob Bernstein wasn't the only person at Human Rights Watch who thought the answer was no.

In September 2000, HRW's board of directors took a vote that still, a decade later, infuriates Sid Sheinberg, a legendary Hollywood mogul (he discovered Steven Spielberg) and current vice-chairman of the board. At the time, Bill Clinton was trying desperately to broker a peace agreement between Yasir Arafat and Ehud Barak, but one of the major sticking points was the right of return. It was an issue that even the most left-wing Israelis did not feel they could compromise on: If Palestinians were permitted to return to Israel en masse, it would imperil the country's future as both a Jewish state and a democracy.

Sheinberg believed strongly that HRW had no business endorsing the right of return. "My view is that the most essential human right is the right to life," he says. "And anybody who sees a deal about to be made where there's been war for fifty or sixty years should think hard about shutting up." The board, however, did not agree. "The vote was something like twenty-seven to one," Sheinberg recalls. "*Bob* voted against me, for which he's apologized on a number of occasions." That December, Ken Roth, HRW's executive director, would send letters to Clinton, Arafat, and Barak urging them to accept the organization's position. The right of return, he wrote, "is a right that persists even when sovereignty over the territory is contested or has changed hands."

But something telling had happened to Sheinberg immediately following the meeting in September. "I go to my apartment—I have an apartment in New York—and, when I get to my apartment, the phone starts to ring," he recalls. "And I get a number of phone calls from a variety of board members who tell me, 'Sid, we really agree with you … but we didn't want to go against management.'" Another board member, David Brown, confirms that he and others shared Sheinberg's reservations, if quietly. "Sid is very vocal, but he wasn't the only one," he says. "There were a number of people upset."

These tensions would fester within HRW in the years to come. "There are more people that have a concern about this on the board than the people who don't have a concern about this think there are," Sheinberg says. "I'm not the only one who's concerned about this. And, by the way, it also includes certain staff members. I've had staff members come to me and tell me off the record that they're not happy with the way this particular thing is being done, but they're not going to say anything."

Human Rights Watch was a product of the cold war. During the 1970s, Bernstein—who was president and chairman of Random House—had become interested in the plight of Soviet dissidents like Andrei Sakharov and Natan Sharansky. In 1978, three years after the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Helsinki Accords (which included language on human rights), Bernstein established Helsinki Watch, a group dedicated to monitoring human rights violations behind the Iron Curtain. In 1981, Helsinki Watch was joined by Americas Watch, which sought to expose the abuses of Latin American dictators, many of them quietly supported by the Reagan administration. "We were raising money from the right for Helsinki Watch and from the left for Americas Watch," Bernstein remembers. Helsinki Watch and Americas Watch would become just two stars in a constellation of regional "watch committees," all of which were brought under the Human Rights Watch umbrella in 1988. By the time Bernstein stepped down as chairman a decade later—he is now founding chairman emeritus—HRW had become a major force in international politics. Today, the group has a budget of $44 million, conducts research on about 90 countries, and churns out dozens of reports per year. It dispatches staffers to monitor human rights abuses around the globe, putting pressure on dictatorships like China, Sudan, and Cuba, as well as on democracies like the United States. To take just one example, it was frequently cited for its work exposing the horrors of Saddam Hussein's regime. It is widely considered the gold standard in human rights reporting—an organization whose conclusions nobody can afford to ignore.

Bernstein—now a gregarious octogenarian—had always considered himself a friend of Israel; but, for a long time, he didn't follow events there particularly closely. Any Zionism on his part manifested itself mostly in regular contributions to the New Israel Fund—a left-wing NGO that finances Israeli human rights groups. But, as the Second Intifada erupted, following

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the failure of the Oslo process, Bernstein began paying closer attention to HRW's work on Israel. And he didn't like what he was seeing.

With Palestinian suicide bombings reaching a crescendo in early 2002, precipitating a full-scale Israeli counterterrorist campaign across the West Bank, HRW's Middle East and North Africa division (MENA) issued two reports (and myriad press releases) on Israeli misconduct—including one on the Israel Defense Forces' assault on terrorist safe havens in the Jenin refugee camp. That report—which, to HRW's credit, debunked the widespread myth that Israel had carried out a massacre—nevertheless said there was "strong *prima facie* evidence" that Israel had "committed grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions," irking the country's supporters, who argued that the IDF had in fact gone to great lengths to spare Palestinian civilians. (The decision not to launch an aerial bombardment of the densely populated area, and to dispatch ground troops into labyrinthine warrens instead, cost 23 Israeli soldiers their lives—crucial context that HRW ignored.) It would take another five months for HRW to release a report on Palestinian suicide bombings—and another five *years* for it to publish a report addressing the firing of rockets and mortars from Gaza, despite the fact that, by 2003, hundreds had been launched from the territory into Israel. (HRW did issue earlier press releases on both subjects.)

In the years to come, critics would accuse HRW of giving disproportionate attention to Israeli misdeeds. According to HRW's own count, since 2000, MENA has devoted more reports to abuses by Israel than to abuses by all but two other countries, Iraq and Egypt. That's more reports than those on Iran, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Syria, Algeria, and other regional dictatorships. (When HRW includes press releases in its count, Israel ranks fourth on the list.) And, if you count only full reports—as opposed to "briefing papers," "backgrounders," and other documents that tend to be shorter, less authoritative, and therefore less influential—the focus on the Jewish state only increases, with Israel either leading or close to leading the tally. There are roughly as many reports on Israel as on Iran, Syria, and Libya *combined*.

HRW officials acknowledge that a number of factors beyond the enormity of human rights abuses go into deciding how to divide up the organization's attentions: access to a given country, possibility for redress, and general interest in the topic. "I think we tend to go where there's action and where we're going to get reaction," rues one board member. "We seek the limelight—that's part of what we do. And so, Israel's sort of like low-hanging fruit."

Bernstein, however, had started HRW primarily to reach for the high-hanging fruit—closed societies where human rights reporting was lacking. He was not opposed to HRW criticizing Israel. But, with the country already host to dozens of well-staffed human rights organizations—not to mention a vibrant free press and an activist Supreme Court that frequently restrained government and military policies—he questioned the wisdom of devoting more attention to the Jewish state than to countries with far worse human rights records and many fewer self-correcting mechanisms. And so, he reached out to someone who could help him look at HRW's work with fresh eyes. In 2005, he introduced Roth to Steve Apkon, the founder of a nonprofit film center that had hosted the Human Rights Watch Film Festival in recent years. Apkon—a mild-mannered 48-year-old who formerly worked on Wall Street and was an active supporter of Seeds of Peace, a program that seeks to foster friendships between Israeli and Palestinian youth—was invited to serve on MENA's advisory committee, which met every few months. As Apkon understood it, the committee had a variety of functions, one of which was to provide input on MENA's work. While Apkon had no problem with—indeed, supported—the idea of ferreting out Israeli human rights abuses, he quickly sensed a palpable hostility toward Israel among the HRW brass. He also began to feel that advisory committee meetings were not taken seriously by HRW staff. They were "dog-and-pony shows" with "no room for dialogue," he recalls. "It was quite exasperating to a number of people there."

Indeed, despite the tremendous amount of goodwill inside the organization toward Bernstein personally, he and his allies—who also included Edith Everett, a member of both the MENA advisory committee and the HRW board, a former stockbroker, and a philanthropist who has donated millions to aid Druze Arabs in Israel—eventually came to believe that their concerns were falling on deaf ears. For Everett, the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war was a turning point. "Participating on the board became most difficult since [that war]," she recalls. While Everett agreed with some of HRW's critiques—on Israel's use of cluster munitions, for example—she took issue with many of the organization's conclusions, including its reporting on human shield use in Lebanon. (In a 2007 report, HRW insisted that Hezbollah fighters did not shield themselves and their weapons among the local civilian population on a widespread basis.) For a long time, Everett had felt there was a healthy exchange about these issues inside HRW, but that had begun to change. "I felt in recent times there was less of a dialogue," she says. "It seemed to me that there was a commitment to a point of view—that Israel's the bad guy here."

During the third week of the five-week war, the organization published a report on "Israel's indiscriminate attacks against civilians. (A report on Hezbollah rocket fire would not come out for another year, although, again, HRW did issue press releases on the subject in the interim.) The report said there was evidence suggesting that, in some cases, "Israeli forces deliberately targeted civilians." Critics, such as Alan Dershowitz and Bar-Ilan University Professor Avi Bell, jumped on the report and related documents, arguing that some of their assertions were highly questionable. HRW ceded no ground, accusing Dershowitz and Bell of "armchair obfuscations." But, when it issued its more comprehensive report on Lebanese fatalities a year later, the organization admitted that the first report had indeed gotten key facts wrong. For example, an Israeli strike in the village of Srifa—the second-deadliest attack described in the first report—turned out to have killed not "an estimated 26 civilians" (as HRW had originally claimed) or "as many as 42 civilians" (as Roth later wrote), but 17 combatants and five civilians. "[E]yewitnesses were not always forthcoming about the identity of those that died, and in the case of Srifa, misled our researchers," HRW wrote. Elsewhere in the new report, HRW acknowledged that the original had missed mitigating factors that cast some Israeli strikes in a different light. (There were also dozens of discrepancies between the two reports regarding names, ages, the timing of attacks, and other factual details.)

Even Richard Goldstone sympathized with Bernstein on the politicization of the U.N. Human Rights Council.

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Robert James—a businessman, World War II veteran, and member of the MENA advisory committee who has been involved with HRW almost since its inception—calls the group "the greatest NGO since the Red Cross," but argues that it is chronically incapable of introspection. "Bob is bringing this issue up on Israel," he says. "But Human Rights Watch has a more basic problem. . . . They cannot take criticism."

RECENT DISPUTES over Israel inside HRW have frequently involved Sarah Leah Whitson, the 43-year-old director of MENA (and one of the officials who made the controversial fundraising appearance in Saudi Arabia). Raised by a mother who had been born in the Armenian quarter of Jerusalem's Old City, Whitson spent summers as a child with family in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, later studying abroad in Egypt. Following law school, she became a corporate attorney but pursued activism on the side, volunteering for, among other groups, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (where she was co-organizer of a delegation in 2002 that lobbied Kofi Annan to press ahead with a U.N. investigation of Israel's Jenin operation) and MADRE (a women's rights group, with which she traveled to Lebanon on a solidarity mission in 1996 after an Israeli bombing campaign). As I stepped into her office for an interview in February, I noticed that a poster for *Paradise Now*, a movie that attempts to humanize Palestinian suicide bombers, hangs on her door and that two photos of bereaved Gazans hang on her wall.

To Whitson's credit, under her leadership, MENA has avoided laying the Palestinian plight entirely at the feet of Israel (the past few years have seen reports on abuses of Palestinians in Iraq and Jordan, not to mention Palestinian-on-Palestinian violence in the West Bank and Gaza). Moreover, during her tenure, MENA has expanded the number of nations that it tracks. "In every country—even if it's a small, tiny country like the United Arab Emirates—there are a lot of problems," she says. "And, if you're the one guy who's being sodomized with a cattle prod by the ruler's brother, then that's a big problem. And you want attention for it."

"She was the first person who actually ran that division competently," says someone who has worked with Whitson. "Things in that division came together under her. Very energetic and committed. And she does get excited about a lot of other issues." But, on the region's most politicized conflict, Whitson's allegiances seem clear. "She definitely has no sympathy for the Israeli side," this person told me. "And she does, I think, have a lot of personal identification with the Palestinian cause."

A hint of these inclinations surfaced in a January interview with a Moroccan newspaper. On the one hand, Whitson parroted the HRW mantra of neutrality in war. "We are not with this side or that side," she said. "We are on the side of civilians on both sides of the conflict. We say that Israel is wrong when it targets Palestinian civilians and that Hamas is wrong when it targets Israeli civilians." But she added, "Of course, no one can deny that the pain and destruction that Israel causes cannot be compared to what Hamas is doing."

Critics have pointed out that a number of Whitson's colleagues in MENA—such as Joe Stork, who came to HRW after decades as a leader of the left-wing Middle East Research and Information Project, where he was part of an editorial collective that ran an extremely anti-Israel journal—arrived at the organization with backgrounds in the pro-Palestinian movement. Sid Sheinberg argues that the mere appearance of a biased jury at MENA ill-serves HRW. "Is it smart to have a number of people about which questions can be asked—in either direction?" he says. But, when I asked Whitson about this critique—and, specifically, about a former researcher on Israel who, before starting at HRW, wrote pro-Palestinian dispatches from the West Bank and Gaza describing Israeli soldiers as "protected by arrogance and hatred and a state and an army and the world's superpower"—she said she didn't see a problem with this situation. "For people who apply for jobs to be the researcher in Israel-Palestine, it's probably going to be someone who's done work on Israel-Palestine with a human rights background," she explained. "And guess what? People who do work with a human rights background on Israel-Palestine tend to find that there are a *lot* of Israeli abuses. And they tend to become human rights activists on the issue." For his part, HRW program director Iain Levine, who oversees the organization's 16 divisions, acknowledges that people from many divisions—and not just MENA—arrive from "solidarity backgrounds," but insists that, "when they come to the door of this organization, they park those things behind."

Whether or not Whitson has done so, she clearly favors a tough approach toward the Jewish state. She has argued that, far from being too harsh toward Israel, HRW is actually too lenient. "[B]elieve me," she wrote in an e-mail to a MENA advisory committee member, "on israel in particular, we are overly cautious and extremely kid-gloved because of the harassment we endure." Less definitive—but still arguably revealing—evidence about Whitson's politics can be found in her opinion of Norman Finkelstein, the activist and avowed Hezbollah supporter who has likened Israel to Nazi Germany. The two became acquainted years ago, and she brought him to HRW to discuss his 2005 book *Beyond Chutzpah*. ("He had a very mixed reception," she remembers. "I think people did not find his style particularly persuasive.") In late 2006, when Finkelstein launched a letter-writing campaign demanding that HRW officials apologize for a press release critical of Palestinian officials (which they eventually did), one HRW observer e-mailed Whitson to share thoughts on Finkelstein's over-the-top rhetoric. Whitson replied: "I agree w/ u that norm undermines himself and his cause w/ the language he uses, and his anger sometimes gets the better of him and his brilliant mind and generous spirit. I continue to have tremendous respect and admiration for him, because as you probably know, making Israeli abuses the focus of one's life work is a thankless but courageous task that may well end up leaving all of us quite bitter."

AS BERNSTEIN and his allies saw it, Whitson and others in MENA consistently ignored the context of Israeli actions—context that might have created a more accurate picture. That was the overriding complaint in a letter Edith Everett wrote to HRW in June 2008, outlining her dissatisfaction with the way the organization was treating Israel. HRW had repeatedly called for Israel to lift its blockade of Hamas-controlled Gaza. Everett pointed out that "the original contravention of human rights lies with Hamas and these terrorist organizations and if they were to stop their unprovoked attacks on Israeli civilians there would be no restrictions on the flow of goods into Gaza."

That month, Bernstein made a presentation at a meeting of the executive committee of HRW's board. After asking HRW staffers to leave the room, he told the assembled something they already knew—that he had concerns about MENA's Israel work—and something they did not: "I told them, from then on, they couldn't assume that I would remain silent to the public."

Ken Roth was absent from the meeting—his daughter was graduating from

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high school that day—but he was furious when he found out. He immediately e-mailed Bernstein's son Bill, a classmate from Brown, lamenting how unfortunate he found it that a man who had spent his life championing human rights had become an apologist for Israel. He appealed to the younger Bernstein to intervene, warning that his father would do great harm to the organization and to his own reputation.

Not everyone at HRW, however, was eager to keep Bernstein in the fold. His persistent questions had become a never-ending source of annoyance to Whitson. "It just came to this point where we would have countless meetings with him explaining things over and over," Whitson says. "And then, he would just ask the same question as if you'd never had the conversation before. And you're like, 'But did you actually read the report? Did you actually see what it said? Because it answers your question, and we've discussed this, like, eighteen times.'" Her attitude toward Bernstein's threat was one of indifference. "You're like, 'OK, just go public and get it over with.'"

At the time, however, Bernstein was still unsure of himself. He had begun consulting prominent outsiders, among them just war philosopher Michael Walzer and *Newsweek*'s Fareed Zakaria, a friend of his son Tom. Zakaria spoke to Bernstein at length—first in a face-to-face meeting, then in a series of phone calls. Bernstein had already started putting his thoughts to paper—thousands of words' worth—but felt he was getting nowhere and urged Zakaria to take up the cause instead. Zakaria demurred. "My advice to him," Zakaria says, "was that, if he felt as strongly as he did, then he needed to speak out because the impact of the founder of Human Rights Watch talking about his disillusionment with the organization was going to be far greater than an outsider who had no historical association with the organization."

Bernstein also raised some of his concerns with then–HRW board member Richard Goldstone, who would go on to write the U.N.'s much-maligned report on the Gaza war. There are few more reviled figures in Israel right now than Goldstone, but even *he* sympathized with Bernstein on certain points, such as the politicized nature of the U.N. Human Rights Council, which, after being created in 2006, had directed its first nine condemnations at Israel. In March 2008, barely a year before he accepted UNHRC's mandate to investigate the Gaza war, he told Bernstein that he thought the body's performance had been hopeless and expressed

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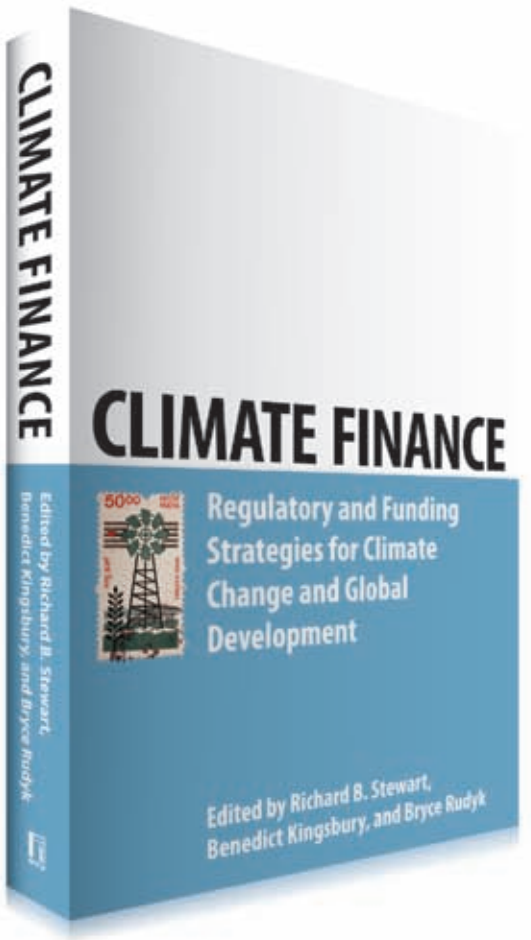
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ambivalence as to whether HRW should continue appearing before it. He also agreed with Bernstein that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's increasingly aggressive anti-Israel rhetoric, in combination with his threatening policies, was an issue worthy of HRW's attention. Goldstone pushed Roth to address it, but to no avail. (When I asked Roth in a February interview at his office about HRW's refusal to take a position on Ahmadinejad's threats against Israel, including his famous call for Israel to be "wiped off the map," Roth quibbled about the way the statement had been translated in the West—"there was a real question as to whether he actually said that"—then told me that it was not HRW's place to render judgments on such rhetoric: "Let's assume it is a military threat. We don't take on governments' military threats just as we don't take on aggression, per se. We look at how they behave. So, we wouldn't condemn a military threat just as we wouldn't condemn an invasion—we would look at how the government wages the war." Whitson, who sat in on the interview, offered her two cents: "You know, that statement was also matched by Hillary Clinton saying that the Iranian regime should be destroyed or wiped off the map. Again, so, very similar statements, side by side, close in time." For his part, Goldstone told TNR that he eventually came around to the view this was not an issue HRW should take up.)

Bernstein was becoming steadily more frustrated—and two of his closest allies at the organization were soon on their way out. In early 2009, Whitson informed Steve Apkon that, if he wished to serve another term on the MENA advisory committee, he would be expected to make a contribution in the $10,000 range. Apkon was livid. He dashed off a sharply worded letter to advisory committee chair Shibley Telhami. "An organization that was founded to protect the most basic of human rights—freedom of speech—seeing it as the canary in the coal mine in regards to everything else, seems to have created within its own organization a disregard and intolerance for open dialogue," he wrote. His membership was not renewed. (HRW denies that Apkon's removal had anything to do with his criticisms, attributing it primarily to his failure to make an acceptable contribution.)

Shortly thereafter, Edith Everett was gone. At a MENA advisory committee meeting in March 2009, two months after the war in Gaza, she raised the subject of human shields with HRW senior military analyst Marc Garlasco, who was on hand to discuss the issues he and his fellow researchers were planning to write about: "I said, 'I hope when you talk about the Palestinians in Gaza that you speak about their use of the population as human shields,' and he was beginning to respond to that when Sarah Leah Whitson wouldn't let him speak. She just put an end to that conversation. She said, 'Well, in summation, I think we have to move on,' or something, and I said, 'This is ridiculous,' you know?" Everett immediately tendered her resignation from both the HRW board and the MENA advisory committee.

At the end of that month, Bernstein sent a long e-mail to the board of HRW. "While I realize that HRW is doing a lot of valuable work, to me the mishandling of the Israel-Palestine situation is like a cancer," he wrote. "After my twenty-one years as chair, I still care deeply about the direction of HRW, and my inability to bring change bothers me."

Just as the internal dispute over Israel was coming to a head, HRW found itself enmeshed in a bizarre controversy. On September 8, 2009, a pro-Israel blogger named Omri Ceren discovered that Marc Garlasco—one of the HRW staffers who had conducted field research on the Gaza and Lebanon wars—was an avid collector of Nazi paraphernalia. The revelation bounced around the blogosphere before quickly reaching the mainstream media. Already under attack from pro-Israel groups, HRW now found itself in a predicament. Initially, the organization came out swinging in Garlasco's defense. But, within days, it changed course and suspended Garlasco. His suspension continued for months. (At one point during this period, according to a source close to him, he was contacted by HRW and told not to talk to me. When asked whether this was true, HRW declined to comment.) Eventually, HRW's lawyers and his own hammered out a severance agreement, which included a nondisclosure clause. On February 15, he officially resigned.

Steve Apkon was watching the entire episode with regret. Apkon liked Garlasco personally and respected his expertise. He thought that Garlasco—far from being a Nazi fetishist out to demonize Israel—actually had thoughtful views on the Middle East conflict. Both men lived in Pleasantville, New York, a quaint Westchester town, and they had gotten to know each other through Apkon's film center, where one of Garlasco's daughters had taken a class. Back in February 2009, shortly after Garlasco had returned from Gaza, the two met for coffee at the Pleasantville Starbucks (there is only one). Apkon found what Garlasco had to say striking: Garlasco told him that he had reservations about HRW's approach to covering warfare, and specifically some of its work on Israel—including research for which he had been the point person.

As it turned out, Apkon wasn't alone. Garlasco is a complicated character—a gun-toting, beer-drinking *Battlestar Galactica* fan with a cloak-and-dagger persona like something out of a spy novel—and his views on HRW were hard to pin down. On the one hand, he publicly endorsed HRW's reporting on Israel, telling TNR, "I stand by every report I ever worked on as a factual representation of the events." And yet, he also criticized elements of this work to Apkon—and others.

In many ways, Garlasco was an odd fit at HRW. Prior to being hired in 2003, he had served as the head of "high-value targeting" at the Defense Intelligence Agency during the Iraq war. He opposed the invasion, however, and joined HRW shortly after the fall of Baghdad. His first assignment at his new job was to investigate collateral damage from the airstrikes he had helped plan. Whitson told me that Garlasco (who was one of only a handful of people at HRW with military experience) brought unique skills to the organization and enhanced its credibility. "He could look at the plumes in the sky and know exactly what weapon that was," she says. "He could look at a canister and know what kind of a munition it was. He could look and see where the guidance system is."

Garlasco was hardly a reflexive apologist for Israel. His time on the ground in Gaza convinced him that the IDF had a lot to answer for—using Palestinians as human shields, heavy artillery fire in densely populated areas, and rules of engagement so lax that large numbers of civilian deaths were inevitable. And he thought that both sides, Hamas and Israel, had committed war crimes during the conflict. Still, he believed that there was a fog of war that most of his colleagues failed to appreciate. "He said … 'If I were an Israeli, I'd be so frustrated,'" recalls one friend. "You are trying to get people who are shooting from civilian areas, and how do you deal with that? I mean, I remember him talking about that—that it's an impossible quandary for a soldier. Sometimes, they actually turn out to be kids playing on the roof, and sometimes they're guys with missiles."

During the war, Garlasco had gotten a lot of attention for discussing Israel's use

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of a chemical agent called white phosphorous. CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera ran segments featuring Garlasco explaining the dangers white phosphorous posed to civilians: On contact with skin, it could cause second- and third-degree burns; it could even burn down houses. Soon, news reports all around the world were repeating the story.

But Garlasco would later tell Apkon and others that he thought the white phosphorous controversy had been blown out of proportion. From his experience at the Pentagon, Garlasco knew that U.S. and British forces had used white phosphorous in Iraq and Afghanistan, and usually for the same purpose that the IDF used it in Gaza: as a smokescreen to obscure troop movements on the ground—a permissible use under international law. To be sure, Garlasco did not believe that the IDF had used white phosphorous properly in every instance. But he told multiple people that he thought HRW had placed too much emphasis on this issue—specifically telling one person that he had been pushed by HRW headquarters to focus on white phosphorous at the expense of topics he thought more deserving of attention because, he suspected, it was regarded as a headline-generating story. (HRW denies that it pushed Garlasco on the subject.) What's more, while making legal judgments was not within Garlasco's jurisdiction, he told Apkon that he did not think Israel's use of white phosphorous amounted to a war crime. (In a subsequent report on white phosphorous, the first of six thus far on the Gaza war, HRW would say that evidence "indicates the commission of war crimes.")

Beyond these disagreements, Garlasco had larger critiques of HRW. He thought that the organization had a habit of ignoring necessary context when covering war, he told Apkon; and he told multiple sources that he thought Whitson and others at MENA had far-left political views. As someone who didn't have strong ideological commitments of his own on the Middle East, this bothered him. "When he reported on Georgia, his firm feeling was he could report whatever he wanted," says one source close to Garlasco. "And, when he was talking to headquarters, the feeling was, let the chips fall where they may. He did not feel that way dealing with the Middle East division." In addition, Garlasco alleged in conversations with multiple people that HRW officials in New York did not understand how fighting actually looked from the ground and that they had unrealistic expectations for how wars could be fought. To Garlasco, the reality of war was far more complicated. "He looks at that organization as one big attempt to outlaw warfare," says the person close to Garlasco. Around the time he had coffee with Apkon last February, he was beginning to look for another job.

But, before he could find one, the Nazi memorabilia story had landed in *The New York Times*. The controversy was overblown—Garlasco's interest in the subject stemmed from the fact that his grandfather had been conscripted into the Nazi army, and he collected all sorts of World War II artifacts, not just Third Reich items—but it was enough to ruin whatever future he had left at HRW. Watching the scandal spin out of control, Apkon took note of the irony that the pro-Israel community had lynched one of the people at HRW who was most sympathetic to its concerns. "You're sitting there watching this, and you realize: They're going after the wrong guy!" Apkon says. "He's not coming with a political agenda. He's the one guy that's there that's trying to make balanced decisions and judgments about this stuff."

In April, Bernstein made his case one last time at a board meeting, but, by this point, it was clear that he was not going to prevail. Six months later, he finally published his op-ed. The reaction from HRW was defensive; in a letter to the editor that appeared in the *Times*, the current and past chairs of the HRW board accused Bernstein of arguing "that Israel should be judged by a different human rights standard than the rest of the world"—something he had never said and clearly does not believe.

Not long after he published the op-ed, I visited Bernstein in his Park Avenue office, to which he still takes a taxi every morning. Going public with his criticisms, he said during our interview, "was a very hard thing for me to do." It has ruptured friendships, not to mention his ties to an organization whose history is very much wrapped up in his own. (In the waiting room at HRW headquarters in the Empire State Building, next to the famous picture of tanks in Tiananmen Square, lies a plaque dedicated to Bernstein with an inscription: "Between tyranny and freedom stands the courage of the individual.") Yet, as difficult as it was to go public, Bernstein does not believe that Human Rights Watch left him with much choice. "They think they've heard me out," he says. "You see, they think they've listened to me until they can't listen anymore. Actually, they haven't listened at all."◆

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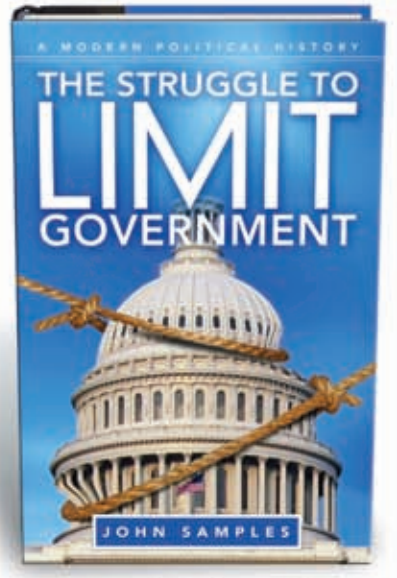

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Matthew Bandsuch

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Planet Doom

Nine scenarios for imminent apocalypse—only one is global warming.

BRADFORD PLUMER

For most of the 2.5 million years that humans and their predecessors have been around, the Earth has been a volatile place. Subtle shifts in the planet's orbit have triggered large temperature swings; glaciers have marched across North America and Europe and then retreated. But, about 10,000 years ago, something unusual happened: The Earth's climate settled into a relatively stable state, global temperatures started hovering within a narrow band, and sea levels stopped rising and falling so drastically. Historians argue that this fortuitous geological period, known as the Holocene, allowed civilization to develop. Modern humans no longer had to pluck whatever they could from an unreliable environment and move on. The relatively predictable climate patterns allowed them to colonize coastal regions, clear forests for agriculture, and raise livestock. "Once you get stability, you can start planning for the future," explains Sander van der Leeuw, who directs the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University. "You're no longer acting on the moment but acting with the future in mind. And that's what our whole society is based on—being able to invest in the future."

Because of quirks in the Earth's orbit, the planet would likely remain in this stable state for at least the next 10,000 years if left to its own devices. But the planet isn't being left to its own devices. Humans are now drastically altering the natural world in so many ways—mowing down forests, depleting freshwater supplies, fiddling with the planet's thermostat—that some experts have recently begun arguing that we've left the Holocene and moved into an entirely new geological epoch of our own making, dubbed the Anthropocene.

Global warming is the big change that tends to get all the attention. By now, it's well-established that humans are adding heat-trapping gases to the atmosphere at an unprecedented rate. Climatologists have assembled ample evidence that we run the risk of catastrophe if we add too much carbon dioxide to the air. Yet it may be too narrow to focus on climate change in isolation. In recent years, some scientists have begun casting a wary eye at all the *other* ways we're upending the Earth's natural state, from disrupting the planet's nitrogen cycle to using up resources to dousing our rivers and oceans with new synthetic chemicals. Those researchers are starting to ask whether these trends, too, could have their own tipping points—whether, as with climate, there are boundaries over which we would be incredibly foolish to cross. And what they have found suggests that, by pushing the Earth outside of the state that has persisted for the last 10,000 years, we risk squandering the stability that made civilization possible in the first place.

The idea that there are "tipping points" in nature has been discussed by scientists since the 1970s. An ecosystem can change slowly and gradually over many years until, suddenly, it reaches a threshold, at which point rapid and potentially irreversible shifts ensue.

One much-studied example is the Sahara Desert. About 6,000 years ago, the vast expanse of the Sahara was filled with lakes, wetlands, and a lush variety of species—ancient cave paintings in the region depict crocodiles. Then, some 5,500 years ago, the region became a massive desert over the relatively short course of about 200 years. "That sort of rapid change just doesn't make sense," notes Jonathan Foley, director of the University of Minnesota's Institute on the Environment. "Unless, that is, you allow for non-linear systems in nature." One hypothesis is that a slight change in Earth's orbit led to a gradual decline in solar energy, which meant fewer monsoons hitting the region. The tipping point then came when a prolonged drought killed off the local vegetation that helped supply the area with moisture. At that point, a feedback loop kicked in, and the Sahara started drying of its own accord—more plants died off, which, in turn, made the region even more parched—until the whole area desertified in remarkably short order.

Over the last decade, a number of climate scientists have looked for tipping points that could be triggered by global warming. It's worrisome enough that a warming world would produce steadily rising sea levels, droughts, and heat waves. But what keeps many researchers up at night is the idea of rapid, non-linear changes that utterly transform the planet. To take one example, as Arctic sea ice begins melting, the dark water underneath starts absorbing a greater share of sunlight, which, in turn, causes the ice to melt even faster. Models suggest that this feedback could reach a point where the sea ice begins melting at an incredibly fast pace and essentially collapses—indeed, some Arctic researchers think we may have already crossed this threshold. Other possible scenarios include the disintegration of the ice sheet on Greenland, rapid die-off of rain forests in the Amazon, or, even more extreme, a shutdown of the ocean currents in the Atlantic that maintain Europe's livable climate. (Fortunately, that last one, while feasible, doesn't appear likely anytime soon.)

Scientists continue to argue—sometimes fiercely—over the details and precise timing of these dramatic changes. But the prospect that global warming could produce non-linear disruptions has, understandably, helped inform many climate-policy goals. After all, it would be one thing for human civilization to adapt to sea levels that rose smoothly by, say, one centimeter a year. It would be another to deal with fast and unpredictable rises. That's why the United Nations has recommended limiting warming to no more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels—above that point, we risk large-scale changes beyond our control. But it's also true that scientists can't be certain of where that threshold lies. James Hansen of NASA has famously argued that even the U.N. targets are too rash, and that we should limit atmospheric carbon dioxide to below 350 parts per million (a point we've already passed), based on his study of how quickly ice sheets reacted in prehistoric periods when the Earth's temperature was just 1°C to 2°C warmer than today.

Those discussions, meanwhile, have led some scientists to wonder if there might be other tipping-point thresholds lurking in nature. In 2008, Johan Rockström, the director of the Stockholm Resilience Centre in Sweden, brought together two

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dozen experts across a variety of disciplines to see if they could identify what they called "the rules of the game." What are the natural boundaries that humanity should stay within if we want to keep the Earth in the stable state of the last 10,000 years?

In a paper published last fall in the prestigious journal *Nature*, Rockström and his co-authors created, for the first time, a checklist of all the possible ways the planet is hurtling toward a potentially perilous new course. They identified nine boundaries concerning matters such as climate change, ocean acidification, extinction rates, land and water use, ozone depletion, and the disruption of the Earth's nitrogen and phosphorus cycles. But what was most astounding was just how little we still know about the natural experiment our civilization is unwittingly conducting.

Scientists believe we're leaving the geological epoch—the Holocene—that made civilization possible in the first place.

Take, for instance, ocean acidification. Ocean chemists have long known that, as carbon-dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere rise, more and more of the gas gets absorbed by the ocean and lowers its pH level—in essence, making the waters more acidic. But, up until ten years ago, no one had seriously modeled this effect, and it was assumed to be negligible. "It hadn't been on anyone's radar screens," explains Ellen Thomas, a Yale paleoceanographer. "The thinking had been, 'Well, the oceans are so huge, what can a little extra CO2 in the air really do?'" Then, in 1999, a climate modeler at Stanford named Ken Caldeira was asked by the Energy Department to study the effects of capturing carbon dioxide from smokestacks and injecting it deep into the sea as a way of cutting greenhouse-gas emissions. Caldeira studied the change in ocean pH and then, just for reference, compared it to what would happen if man-made CO2 levels kept rising. The latter proved shocking. Caldeira discovered that the oceans were already on pace to become more acidic than at any time in the past 300 million years. He published his results in 2003, coining the term "ocean acidification."

In the years since, scientists have realized that ocean acidification is, in fact, a huge deal—a problem as worrisome as many of the worst effects of global warming. The lower pH in the oceans will prevent marine organisms from building calcium-carbonate shells. That, in turn, has the potential to weaken or even wipe out many coral reef systems—and the millions of species that depend on them. And that could prove devastating. In Asia alone, some one billion people rely on reef fisheries for food or income. Local economies that rely on oysters, clams, or scallops could go bust. Areas like Florida that depend on reefs as a bulwark against storms would find themselves more vulnerable to hurricane damage. And, while marine scientists still can't pin down the exact point at which a global calamity would ensue, lessons from the past are unnerving. During the last major wave of ocean acidification, 55 million years ago, a vast array of deep-sea species were wiped out—which, in turn, upended marine ecosystems around the world. Given how heavily we rely on the ocean's current food web, that's a prospect we can't dismiss lightly.

Rockström's group also identified a number of potential tipping points related to modern-day industrial agriculture. With nearly seven billion people on the planet and a growing demand for meat, farmers are razing forests and diverting freshwater for irrigation at a stunning pace. It's not hard to see that we could soon reach the point where irreversible degradation becomes likely in many areas. The Aral Sea in Central Asia, once the world's fourth-largest lake, has already become so drained that it is now largely desert, causing the area's once-robust fishing economy to implode and leaving trawlers marooned on the sands. And Foley points out that, on some islands in Indonesia, destruction of rain forests has reached the point where local weather patterns have been altered, drying out the area and, in turn, making the remaining trees more susceptible to forest fires. In Borneo, the black smoke has grown so thick that it has interfered with air and sea traffic and is causing widespread respiratory illnesses.

Another unsustainable trend the group pinpointed involved our reliance on synthetic fertilizer. Ever since the early twentieth century, when German chemist Fritz Haber devised a method for capturing nitrogen from the air to make ammonia gas, humans have depended on artificial nitrogen fertilizer to boost crop productivity. It was a world-changing invention, enabling the planet to keep feeding itself even as the population ballooned. But the practice has also inflicted heavy damage on the water and soil we depend on. The vast bulk of the nitrogen and phosphorus used in artificial fertilizers makes its way into the rivers and oceans. In areas like the Gulf of Mexico and the Baltic Sea, the excess nitrogen has overstimulated the growth of algae, which chokes off the water's oxygen and kills most other organisms in the vicinity. These vast floating "dead zones" are popping up around the world—areas the size of New Jersey where fish can't survive. Beyond that, excess nitrogen has been found to deplete organic carbon in the soil and decimate plant species in certain areas. In essence, we have overwhelmed the Earth's nutrient cycle—Rockström's group suggested that global nitrogen use was more than four times the "safe" threshold.

Granted, some experts find the idea of a single boundary too simplistic. Stuart Pimm, a professor of conservation ecology at Duke, points to the paper's discussion of biodiversity as an example. Throughout history, the normal "background" rate for extinction has been about one in a million species per year. In the modern era, thanks to activities like deforestation and overfishing, an average of about 100 species per million die off each year—a staggering rate that has the potential to collapse ecosystems. In response, Rockström's group proposed a threshold limit of no more than ten species per million per year. "But that number was completely arbitrary," Pimm says. What's more, the idea of a single worldwide limit on extinction can obscure some important nuances. Since the 1960s, scientists have studied "keystone" species that prop up an entire ecosystem—if, for instance, starfish are removed from a bay, the local mussel population can explode and drive out other species. "Some ecosystems can lose a number of species and be OK," Pimm argues. "Others can lose just a few species and they're manifestly not OK."

Still, the specific numerical thresholds proposed by Rockström's group were, in some sense, a side issue. Experts will continue to haggle over whether, say, 350 ppm or 450 ppm is a "safe" limit for carbon dioxide in the air. But what was more notable—indeed, eerie—about the *Nature* paper was its emphasis on how little we can predict about the many dramatic changes underway. Consider the mounting evidence that aerosol pollution—such as sulfates—can alter local

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rainfall patterns. But, according to Kevin Noone, a colleague of Rockström's at the Stockholm Resilience Centre, there simply aren't enough data yet to be able to settle on a "safe" level of aerosol pollution that would avoid large-scale disruption of, say, the Asian monsoon cycle. Or take chemical pollution. Currently, there are more than 80,000 synthetic chemicals on the global market, and we know that many of them can harm human health or disturb the reproductive cycles of certain species (in much the same way DDT caused eggshell thinning among birds of prey). But no one knows whether there's a point at which some combination of chemical pollutants could throw large-scale ecosystems out of whack. "There's evidence out there that these artificial chemicals can have adverse effects, sure, but no one's really looked at them yet from the perspective of global thresholds," says Will Steffen, a climatologist at the Australian National University who contributed to the *Nature* study. "That was one where we couldn't even guess a boundary."

Scarier still, many of these different processes can interact in unforeseen ways. The heavy use of synthetic nitrogen fertilizers can cause soil to release nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas. Overfishing can make coral reefs less resilient in the face of stresses like ocean acidification and warmer temperatures. Global warming can speed up the rate of extinction. "Once you have all of these dynamic processes in so many dimensions interacting with each other, we no longer have the capability to anticipate what will happen," says van der Leeuw. "That then raises the possibility that these processes will start affecting each other in different ways that can quickly have cascade effects we can't see right now."

And that creates a dilemma: Right now, too many environmental problems are studied in isolation. "Ever since Newton, the tendency of science has been to slice the pie up smaller and smaller," says Noone. As an illustrative example, he notes that scientific literature now boasts a *Journal of Chemical Physics,* a *Journal of Physical Chemistry*, as well as the journal *Physical Chemistry Chemical Physics*.

Yet the research into planetary boundaries suggests that it may be impossible to deal with just one or two environmental issues at a time. At the moment, global warming gets the bulk of attention. But treating it as the only problem could lead to misguided solutions. For instance, in recent years, some researchers have broached the idea of geoengineering as a cure for climate change—one idea is that we would reflect some of the Earth's sunlight in order to cool the planet down. If rising temperatures were our sole concern, that might not be a bad idea. But, of course, that solution would do nothing about the carbon-dioxide emissions that are acidifying the world's oceans, or the frenetic pace of deforestation that could alter the Earth's landscape irreparably.

THE *NATURE* STUDY, with its many visions of destruction, is enough to cause one to crawl into a cave and die. But the notion of planetary boundaries is also very different from past doomsaying. Inherent in the concept, in fact, is cause for optimism. Back in the 1970s, the Club of Rome think tank commissioned an influential book titled *The Limits to Growth*, which predicted that the combination of a rapidly swelling world population and finite natural resources would put severe limits on economic growth. As it turned out, many of the book's ominous predictions were mistaken—the authors had underestimated the ability of both markets and technology to overcome resource constraints.

Similarly, an important lesson from recent history proves that it's possible for humanity to stay safely within the Earth's natural boundaries and still thrive. One threshold that Rockström's group identified involved the stratospheric ozone layer, which shields the planet from harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays. As it turns out, this is the one known planetary boundary that we're no longer in danger of crossing—but the story of how that came to pass is illustrative.

The acidification of the ocean is a big deal, a problem as worrisome as the worst effects of global warming.

In the 1970s, scientists were puzzling over the fact that readings of ozone concentration in the Antarctic region were much lower than anyone had expected. (The readings were so odd that, for nearly a decade, atmospheric scientists dismissed the data as due to instrument error.) At around the same time, scientists were discovering that concentrations of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)—chemicals used in refrigerators and air conditioners—were lingering in the atmosphere at high rates. In 1974, chemists Mario Molina and Sherwood Rowland published a paper arguing that the two phenomena may be linked, although it was a difficult hypothesis to prove. DuPont, the world's biggest manufacturer of CFCs, disputed the connection, and it wasn't until the mid-'80s that hard evidence confirming the link came in—including the discovery of a gaping ozone hole over Antarctica.

Looking back, it's remarkable to ponder the serendipity of these discoveries—and how little margin for error we had. As luck would have it, DuPont had been using chlorine instead of bromine to produce CFCs. As far as anyone could tell, the two elements were interchangeable. But, as another prescient ozone researcher, Paul Crutzen, later noted, bromine is 45 times as effective at destroying ozone as chlorine. Had DuPont chosen to use bromine, the ozone hole could well have spanned the globe by the 1970s instead of being largely confined to Antarctica—long before anyone had a glimmering of the problem. It's not hard to see what massive worldwide ozone depletion would've meant. Punta Arenas, the southernmost town of Chile, sits under the Antarctic ozone hole, and skin cancer rates there have soared by 66 percent since 1994. If humans had destroyed stratospheric ozone across the globe, we would likely be unable to set foot outdoors without layers of sunscreen and dark shades to prevent eye damage. Worse, the excess UV rays could have killed off many of the single-celled organisms that form the basis for the ocean's food chain and disrupted global agriculture (studies show that bean and pea crop yields decline about 1 percent for every percent increase in UV exposure).

Happily, though, scientists did discover the ozone hole. And, despite industry warnings that abolishing CFCs would impose unbearable costs, world leaders agreed to phase out the chemicals in 1987, and economic ruin never arrived. DuPont developed a substitute for CFCs, and ozone levels in the atmosphere have stabilized, with the hole over Antarctica expected to heal by 2050. A topic that once graced the cover of *Time* and generated heated congressional debates now barely gets mentioned. We learned to stay within one planetary boundary without impeding human prosperity. That should give us every reason to think we can respect the others we are now barreling past. ◆

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

SOME GERMANS

Maren Ade, a German writer-director, says in an interview that when she was writing the screenplay of her new film and conversing with her two principal actors, she and they studied Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage*. The result, Ade's second feature, called *Everyone Else*, is not exactly at Bergman's level, but the memory of the older picture sheds interesting light on the new one.

First, Ade's couple, loving though they are, are not married. Few would argue that this statistic has zero effect on a relationship. Yet the principal difference between the two films is in the intent of the two directors. Both films follow a couple through a series of events that are caused by and affect their relationship. But Bergman, born in 1918, came from the theater and was conditioned by the cultural context of his time. Ade, born in 1976, is a creature of film and is of quite different conditioning.

Bergman's work is realistic but carefully constructed. His screenplay is built on principles that antecede realism: various climaxes occur that are the vestments of traditional drama. Ade's screenplay is less dramatic—rarely placid but rarely theatrical. Her incidents are much more at the level of daily simmering than of large confrontation. Her mind is keyed to an immediacy made possible technically by the film medium itself and ideationally by postmodernism—particularly the tenet that traditional art, in its very forms, traduces truth.

It would be a stretch to call *Everyone Else* a postmodernist work, but it is hard to imagine its existence if postmodernism had not preceded it. The closing sequence does have a climactic tone, but in the main Ade strives, as do so many contemporary artists, to avoid the "arrangement" of life. She wants the story to seem as if it merely occurred and she happened to be around to observe it. Her film cannot have the beat and pleasure of structure that a Bergman film gives us: we get instead a newly empowered eavesdropping. Ade is by no means the first filmmaker to treat material this way—even the recent gentle *Mid-August Lunch* does it—but she almost makes her film's avoidance of conventional dramatic structure into its very reason for being.

EVERYONE ELSE
Cinema Guild

NOBODY'S PERFECT
Lorber Films

The setting is Sardinia. A young German couple, Chris and Gitti, are vacationing there in his mother's villa. He is an architect, quite successful; she is a publicist for a rock group (called by an English name, The Shames). Chris has been invited to inspect another villa with perhaps the bid to renovate it, though his larger concern just now is his chance in a design competition that he has entered. Still, this motif is kept relatively low under the daily doings, as are the phone calls that she gets from her rock group.

At the start they are being visited by his sister with her small children, and Gitti is teaching a little girl a lesson in manners. The lesson relates to emotional candor, a factor (we learn) in Gitti's and Chris's lives. After the sister and her brood depart, the film focuses on our couple. Two other couples figure later, one of them substantially, but the real subjects are the beings, the breathings, the daily flares of feeling of Chris and Gitti. The concentration is so intense that, even though the whole work is rich with the sun and sheer gorgeousness of Sardinia, we rarely see any Sardinians.

Gitti meets one of the other couples while shopping and accepts an invitation to go boating with them, but Chris sulks—he doesn't want company—and we never see the trip. He himself ducks meeting a man he knows named Hans, who by coincidence is also vacationing on the island with his wife, Sana. Eventually Chris and Gitti are trapped into dinner with them. Sana is pregnant, and through some curious twist—possibly jealousy—this fact seems to goad Gitti into unpleasantness with Hans. The evening ends somewhat abruptly.

The actions of the film are not any more cumulative than life usually is. Its growth is in the growth of our acquaintance with Chris and Gitti, which is seductive in part just because it is available. We follow their meals, their snoozes, their beach trips, their argument about going to a disco; we even share the cuteness of phrase and play that couples create quite privately. Sex is of course part of their beings, and there are two sex scenes—needed to make the film complete—but Ade cloaks them in shadow so that we get them as integral rather than sensational.

Admittedly, within this record of accompaniment is a theme that is sometimes visible: commitment, which seems to interest Gitti more than Chris—parenthood, possible marriage. The last sequence of the film, the only one that could be called dramatic, is tenuously related to Gitti's opening sequence with the little girl. But this is the one element in the screenplay that could be called a pattern. Then, without a "finish," the film simply stops. Ade avoids any kind of fade-out. We have seen, she implies, all that we need to know about these two

ANTHONY RUSSO

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at this time in their lives, so we leave.

Obviously Ade has put heavy responsibility for the film's quality on her two principals. She is justified. Lars Eidinger, as Chris, is just attractive enough, and he has polished a mode of acting that fits perfectly—old-timers might call it behaving, not acting. Gitti needs more because she is much more mercurial in her feelings, and Birgit Minichmayr easily handles the range. Her face, not immediately stunning, grows closer to beauty throughout. In these performances, in their impulses and lulls, we feel that we have been admitted to intimacies.

Ade uses the camera securely. Nothing seems to be composed for it, it just happens to be in the right place when needed. At the last, her film cannot compare with her model Bergman, but at least she shows that truth can come in different sizes.

From Germany, too, arrives a documentary called *NoBody's Perfect* that is warm, appealing, and tinged with humor. All this is somewhat unexpected, because it is about some victims of thalidomide seen fifty years later. The director, Niko von Glasow, who has made four previous films, is himself a victim, with diminutive arms and three-inch hands.

For those who don't remember, between 1957 and 1961 a pharmaceutical plague struck several countries, chiefly Germany and Britain. A drug called thalidomide was put on the market by a German firm, to be used by pregnant women as a cure for morning sickness and as a sedative. Before the drug was found to be harmful for these purposes, it caused about ten thousand defective births. The drug affected the baby's limbs rather than torso or head. American newsmagazines were filled with photos of beautiful babies with shriveled arms, or legs, or arms and legs. About 50 percent of the thalidomide babies are still alive. In Germany and Britain these people receive skimpy compensation from their governments. One of Glasow's purposes in this film is to help make the drug company supplement these payments: the company found legal means to quit long ago.

But *NoBody's Perfect* is, very soon and most powerfully, much more than a propaganda piece. Glasow found eleven victims, mostly German, some British, of considerable interest, and interviewed them in intelligent and comprehending ways, and always with pictorial zest. These people, now in their early fifties, are an actor, an astrophysicist, a teacher of horseback riding, a painter (with her feet), a masseur, a solicitor, a politician, a gardener, a receptionist, and one who is called simply a mother. And the film-maker. All of them are attractively composed persons. (Glasow doesn't mention—probably assuming that he needn't—the most famous victim, the distinguished baritone Thomas Quasthoff, who is now world-renowned.)

Glasow's purpose was to find victims who had made their way, however it was, and who would therefore be self-confident enough to be interviewed and to pose nude for a calendar. This calendar would be used for propaganda purposes against the drug tycoons, to get more money especially for those who have done less well. As Glasow makes his interviewing way along, keenly intelligent and affable, he takes his nude shots—always at some distance—and finishes with his nude self frolicking with his young (fully clothed) normal daughter. And then there's a banquet for all of them.

Yet this film is nowhere near the sickening finish of many movies, a Technicolor affirmation of the human spirit marching bravely on toward the dawn. These people are for the most part more balanced than beatific. Suicide, some of them say, was once considered and rejected. My inference about them all is that at the earliest sentient age, each of them saw his or her disadvantages, then thought, "A person has now arrived in the world who has shriveled limbs and my name. That is grimly that. Now let's get on with it." It is more than courage: it is a triumph of salubrious ego over facts. The film does not jerk tears: it shames us who are stronger.

At the end Glasow tries to take a life-size nude photo to the drug firm's headquarters. His film would be well off without this Michael Moore stunt. Better is his title, adapted perhaps from the last line of Wilder's *Some Like It Hot*. By capitalizing the b in the first word, it fits. ◆

David Hajdu on Music
TRIUMPH OF THE GYPSIES

Django Reinhardt, the Gypsy jazz guitarist whose centennial fell early on this year's calendar, infuriated his closest friend and best collaborator, Stéphane Grappelli, with stereotypically Gypsy-ish bad behavior that only his sublimely atypical but deeply Gypsy-ish music could excuse. Early in the mid-'90s, when Grappelli was in his eighties but still playing regularly at the Blue Note in Manhattan, I did a fairly long interview with him in which he said, emphatically, "Django made me very angry. Django would not be there—we could not find him anywhere. He drank every day. He came [to performances] with no guitar. I gave Django my money. I hated him many times. Ooh . . . but when he played, I loved Django! Everyone loved Django. In the wartime . . . even the Nazis loved Django!"

DJANGO REINHARDT

I presumed that last line was a joke, until I saw, in *Swing Under the Nazis*, an odd little book by the jazz writer Mike Zwerin (who died a few weeks ago), a wartime photograph of a uniformed Third Reich officer posing in front of La Cigale, a Parisian nightclub. Standing alongside him, to his right, was Django Reinhardt. To his left was a row of men, three of them black and one (according to the book) Jewish. The officer was a Luftwaffe Oberleutnant named Dietrich Schulz-Koehn, who, Zwerin said, had a fondness for what Goebbels, in a term that Nazis alone could devise, called "Americano nigger kike jungle music." Schulz-Koehn supposedly helped keep Reinhardt busy performing throughout France during the war, sparing him from the Holocaust that Gypsies call the Porrajmos.

With due respect for Grappelli, who is no longer here to amplify, defend, or retract what he said, I have to take as an absurdity—more than that, as an offense—the proposition that the beauty of Django Reinhardt's music was such that it could melt the Nazi heart. To think of participation in the Third Reich and jazz fandom as meaningfully compatible is to deny—worse, to betray—the values of the music: the free-spiritedness, the exultation in ethnicity, the sheer joyfulness, the robust humanity, of jazz. (The Czech writer Josef Škvorecký touched on this indelibly in *The Bass Saxophone*.) These qualities precisely have made Reinhardt's music a refuge from (if not a defense against) fascism of any form, and they are among the main reasons it endures one hundred years after Reinhardt was born.

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If Grappelli was correct and everyone loved Django when he played, a great many people have also struggled, as Grappelli himself sometimes did, to reconcile the pleasure they took in his music with the displeasure they found in nasty habits of his that are too easy to ascribe to his Gypsy origins. Much as I did at the start of this piece, journalists, critics, musicians, and pretty much all others who have ever referred to Reinhardt have characterized him first as a Gypsy and then as a jazz musician. This makes more sense than it would, say, for people to describe Benny Goodman as a Jewish jazz clarinetist, or Stéphane Grappelli as a gay French-Italian jazz violinist. After all, Reinhardt, by not only drawing deeply from the traditions of Gypsy music but also bringing those traditions to the foreground of his work, created—that is, almost single-handedly invented—a new style: Gypsy jazz.

Still, I didn't hyphenate that phrase as a compound modifier when I introduced Reinhardt here; I let the ethnic term define the artist rather than the school of art. I could not resist carrying on the conception of Reinhardt as a Gypsy who was also a jazz guitarist, in part because his heritage informs his music so obviously and so profoundly, and in part, too, because the very fact that a person is a Gypsy still seems wonderfully strange. Gypsies are the last exotics—more precisely, one of the last people whom others feel free to exoticize, and often to demonize, with impunity in an allegedly enlightened age. The timeworn conception of Gypsies as colorful freaks—entrancing but not to be trusted; uneducated and ungovernable; fearsome but magically endowed, like all people untouched by civilization, with the secrets of love, music, and art—lives on.

In fact, this hoary line of thinking has flourished to help make Gypsy music—in a variety of strains and mutations, including variations on Reinhardt's style of Gypsy jazz—voguish today, especially among young hipsters desperate to find realms of authenticity and bohemianism that the previous generation of hipsters did not already claim. I should add here that I use mainly the traditional term Gypsy, rather than the more conservative Roma, which has currency these days, because Gypsy applies broadly to many lines of people commonly linked as an ethnicity, including Reinhardt's tribe, the Manouche. Gypsy is the term that Reinhardt himself used, and it is still widely employed by Roma in the titles of their formal organizations, much as Native Americans commonly refer to themselves as Indians.

There has been a bit of progress since Reinhardt's day in the way Gypsies and their music are perceived by outsiders (or *gadje* in the Roma language, a word that means "civilians," an artifact of the Gypsies' early history as slave warriors in first-millennium India). A few years before Reinhardt was born, *The New York Times* sought to educate its readers with the insights of an expert lecturer on Gypsy culture, who explained that "These people are scarcely worth even the limited attention that has been paid them in history. All writers agree in the belief that Gypsies as a race are utterly worthless, and their salient characteristics are outshone by the ordinary tramp. They have no literature … [and] we have never read of one being an accomplished musician."

In the world into which Reinhardt was born, Gypsies and their musical art were commonly viewed through the same prism of stereotypes as African Americans and the black music that was already a dominant force in our popular culture. Gypsy tunes and Negro songs were described in nearly interchangeable terms: unlike proper music made by educated whites, the musics of both Gypsies and blacks were thought of not as products of training, practice, expertise, and talent, but as the spontaneous, intuitive responses of primitive creatures. As the *Times*, again, explained, "Like Gypsy music, the songs of the Negroes seem never to have been composed but to be the unpremeditated utterance of experience—of suffering, patience, submission, hope, and spiritual triumph. One cannot hear, unmoved, these memorials of the history of an inarticulate race." Adapting this trope for a kind of progressive advantage, Walter Damrosch, a classical musician sympathetic to jazz, argued, "If proof positive of a soul in the Negro people should be demanded, it can be given, for they have brought over from Africa and developed in this country, even under all the unfavorable conditions of slavery, a music so wonderful, so beautiful and yet so strange that, like the Gypsy music of Hungary, it is at once the admiration and despair of educated musicians of our race."

Reinhardt's mother made some money by fashioning brass jewelry from buried shell casings that she dug up in battle sites of World War I, and her eldest son, Django, grew adept at the skill of creative re-invention valued in his culture. Like many Gypsy performers before and after him, he seemed to understand that the contempt of the *gadje* for people like him also drew them to him, and he both accommodated customers eager to pay for a Gypsy caricature and cheated them by providing music of unforeseeable complexity and sophistication. (Before Reinhardt was doing this in France, his base for most of his professional life, Louis Armstrong was accomplishing something parallel in America, simultaneously exploiting and defying black stereotypes.) For some time now, the story of how he lost two of his fingers on the hand he used on the guitar fretboard in a caravan fire, and then devised a method to play with the nearly immobile stubs, has been popular lore. As a writer for the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, in 1946, in the opening sentence of the first major profile of Reinhardt in the American press, "Django Reinhardt is a temperamental Gypsy whose deficiencies, which include illiteracy and two paralyzed fingers on his left hand, have not prevented him from becoming the most sophisticated hot-guitar player in the world."

Taught by musical members of his extended family, Reinhardt started out playing Gypsy folk tunes, first on the violin, then on a Moreau-like creation with the body of a banjo and the neck of a six-string guitar, and, finally, on a conventional guitar. Once he discovered Armstrong and American jazz, in the late '20s, Reinhardt veered away from Gypsy material in his repertoire, and he devoted the rest of his career mainly to composition, and to re-composition through improvisation. He drew heavily from the Gypsy musical tradition and re-invented the jazz standards that he played, often re-harmonizing pieces with a dense chromaticism to imply both minor and major keys. His music was opulently emotive, euphoric in allegro and wrenching in adagio. Like Armstrong, he had a stunning command of musical time and an uncanny facility as a musician. Steeped in the tenets of showmanship, he liked to stun and to inspire awe. The high drama and wowee factor in Reinhardt's music disguise its rigor and its seriousness, and no doubt contribute significantly to his ongoing appeal among contemporary listeners who would otherwise be put off by the Depression-era ditties he played, such as "Pennies from Heaven" and "Sweet Sue."

Since the guitar replaced the piano as the dominant instrument of popular music—a change not just in instrumentation but also in cultural orientation, from the formal and literate to the informal and vernacular—Reinhardt's rep-

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utation has only grown. When he died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1953, his passing was little remarked. (The major American papers ran notices of a few brief paragraphs.) Rock-and-roll legend tells us that Jimi Hendrix called one of his groups Band of Gypsies in honor of Reinhardt. Boomer rock stars of the guitar-fetish school, such as Dickey Betts of the Allman Brothers and Tommy Iommi of Black Sabbath (who lost parts of two fingers in a youthful day-job accident), cite him as important influences. David Crosby named a son after him. (Until Reinhardt, Django was not a name at all; in the Roma dialect his mother spoke, the word was a verb form that translates approximately to "I wake up.") Literally all of Reinhardt's recorded output is well preserved on CD, and much of it is available on iTunes. Among the many worthy packages on CD are *Djangology*, a forty-four-track, two-disk compilation of highlights from Reinhardt's collaborations with Grappelli in the Hot Club de France and other material; *Complete Recordings of Solo Guitar*, twelve tracks, most of them original compositions or improvisations, every one exquisite; and *The Chronological Classics 1951–1953*, my own favorite of Reinhardt's recordings, his mature and lyrical final work, in which Reinhardt brings the bebop vocabulary into his musical language—on electric guitar.

At a time when jazz festivals have been shrinking or disappearing, an annual series of concerts celebrating Reinhardt and Gypsy swing has been running in New York for ten years now, and the shows have been fine, on the whole, and consistently well attended. Another popular Reinhardt festival has been staged for several years in Detroit (I have never been to it and cannot speak to its quality), and centennial events are scheduled at points around the world this year. A Django Reinhardt centennial tour began several months ago at the Kennedy Center and stopped at the Iridium in Manhattan for three days, and I caught the first and second of its three shows. Dorado Schmitt, a seasoned virtuoso of the Reinhardt style, played impressively with his son Samson, a guitarist with a more contemporary approach, and the hard-swinging accordionist Marcel Loeffler. The club was packed—overcrowded, in fact, and not with the usual Iridium crowd of thick-waisted jazzbos, but with the undergrads and beautiful young professionals who typically fill trendier spots like Le Poisson Rouge, the City Winery, and the Highline Ballroom. At the second show, I was shoehorned into a seat at a table with three graduate students at Pace. The guy to my right watched me taking notes for a while and finally said, pre-emptively, "Don't ask me anything. I don't really like jazz. I'm just really *intrigued* by the Romanies."

That fascination is likely connected to the rise in Gypsy-flavored music in pop and rock over the past decade or so. At least a dozen bands have adapted aspects of the Gypsy sensibility—or the Western conception of that sensibility as crazed, unruly fun—to pop forms. The best known and most influential is without question Gogol Bordello, an exuberant group led by Eugene Hutz, a theatrically madcap singer and songwriter with some Gypsy on his mother's side. The group's music is a hearty, spicy peasant stew made from canned ingredients: folk-song tunes, reduced; street-band instrumentation (guitar, accordion, cymbals, and such); and punk scream-singing. The band comes off best in concert, where its dancing and clowning can be seen as well as felt in the music. Like many of the other groups often clumped

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together under the fittingly untidy category of Gypsy rock, including Mad Manoush, Slavic Soul Party, and Balkan Beat Box, Gogol Bordello provides something precious in rock of any era: pleasure without apology and with only intermittent pandering.

It takes a rarefied kind of cool to earn the approval of so fierce a guardian of coolness as Johnny Depp. Who are his friends? Oh, Iggy Pop, Jim Jarmusch—official paragons of edgy bad-ass "downtown" iconoclasm. And what kind of music does he favor? "I've always loved Gypsy music," he said in a 2006 interview for the film *Gypsy Caravan: Where the Road Bends*, a documentary that followed five Gypsy-music troupes on a six-week tour through North America. One of the groups was Taraf de Haïdouks, whom Depp met on the set of *The Man Who Cried*, the Sally Potter film of 2000 in which Depp played a mysterious Gypsy horseman. Duly taken by music that he describes as "insane … this motherfucker thing," Depp brought his cooler-than-cool buddies to see the Haïdouks and recalled that "They were floating! They couldn't believe it." "By experiencing their music," Depp said, "people can understand that what you've believed about these people has been a lie."

Depp found himself captivated by the Haïdouks, Roma who perform a mixture of Gypsy tunes, Romanian folk songs, and other traditional music in a similar vein. They are superb, virtuosic, and profoundly stirring—and surely the most successful Gypsy group in the world today, not counting Gogol Bordello. Taraf de Haïdouks has released three CDs on the Nonesuch label, and I saw them play a dazzling show at Carnegie Hall a few years ago. (Their name, I should add, translates as Band of Outlaws, and Haïdouks is an alternative spelling of Hajdu, pluralized. This minor fact gives me no special connection to the group's music. My paternal grandparents were born in Brooklyn, and they didn't think of themselves as Roma; my grandmother, who died giving birth to my father, was probably Jewish—we don't know for sure—and her husband was oddly acultural, though enough of a scoundrel to stir talk that he must have been part Gypsy.)

As always, the Gypsies' otherness, their status as outsiders—in concert with a conception of their music as a counteragent to that status—defines them in the imagination of the *gadje*. At the Iridium, Gypsy jazz is thought not to be jazz: therein lies its extramusical appeal. To hipsters like Depp who have "always loved Gypsy music," everything everyone else knows about the Gypsies is a falsehood: to understand the Roma is to share in secret knowledge and assume some of that vaunted otherness. The truth about Gypsies and their music is that the audience has always come to them in pursuit of a lie. It is not the lie of black blood, the Nazi lie, but a relatively benign lie, the lie of narrative myth, of fortune-telling and folk songs. ◆

Alan Wolfe
JEREMIAH, AMERICAN-STYLE

HOPE IN A SCATTERING TIME: A LIFE OF CHRISTOPHER LASCH
By Eric Miller
(Eerdmans, 394 pp., $32)

I.

In a moving tribute to Christopher Lasch written shortly after his death in 1994, Dale Vree, a Catholic convert and the editor of the *New Oxford Review*, wrote that "Calvinism was his true theological inspiration." Lasch was certainly not one of the faithful. "Even before I took so rashly to writing about religion," he once scribbled to himself, "it was an embarrassment to admit that I had none." Yet despite his skepticism, the crucial idea associated with Calvinism since the sixteenth century—an insistence on the complete and utter depravity of the human race—fit Lasch's increasingly dark vision of human purpose almost to perfection. "Calvinism (via Perry Miller) was my downfall," he wrote to an inquiring Barbara Ehrenreich in an undated letter. "Or was it Luther's commentary on Paul's epistle to the Romans, taught to me by Sidney Ahlstrom? Some ancestral throwback to some distant German past? Or just orneriness and perversity? I kept it under wraps for years, but it was bound to come out in the end."

If Lasch's peculiar form of secular Calvinism was a throwback to his family's past, it must have been a distant one. Lasch was born to Robert and Zora Schaupp Lasch in Omaha, Nebraska in 1932. Although descended from Midwestern Lutherans on her father's side, Zora "had not a spark of religious faith," as she described herself in her unpublished autobiography. A feminist and a rebel, she was very much a product of the Roaring Twenties, Nebraska-style. After receiving her doctorate in philosophy from Bryn Mawr, she returned to the state university in Lincoln but was denied permission to teach ethics because of her commitment to naturalism. She included among her acquaintances John Dewey and Bertrand Russell. The only thing she had in common with the fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan was her home state.

Robert came from an even more agnostic background than his wife. His parents did not attend church, and although they enrolled their son briefly in Sunday school, before long, as Robert put it, "the pretense of piety was gratefully dropped." He spent his life in the field of journalism and his politics in the service of the left. A Midwestern progressive committed to social justice at home and skeptical of the projection of American power abroad, he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1966 for his antiwar editorials published in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Robert outlived Kit, as his son would always be known. Doing so enabled him to communicate his displeasure toward Kit's preoccupation with religious themes. "You must be back from your vacation by now," he wrote him in 1990, "the biggest question of it being: 'What in God's name were you doing at a conference on theology?' " Robert found it difficult enough to accept Kit's increasing cultural conservatism. The son's interest in religious questions left the father baffled.

Kit Lasch died at the age of sixty-two, and so we will never know whether he would have eventually gone all the way and joined a church; chances are he was too much of an iconoclast for that. It hardly matters, though, for when it came to the form and content of the jeremiad, the prophetic tradition of reminding us ferociously of our fallen state, there was no greater master during his lifetime. It seems appropriate that the first full-length biography of this major critic of American society and American culture should be written by a historian who teaches at a Christian college—Geneva, near Pittsburgh—named after Calvin's hometown. And Eric Miller's fine book has been published by Eerdmans, a press founded by a Christian Reformed Church immigrant from Holland and located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the epicenter of Calvinist America. Compared with an era that produced Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, America

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in the past few decades, for all its God talk, has lacked major theologians capable of attracting a widespread readership. The Lord works in mysterious ways, and if religious truths can be discussed in the general culture and even make it into presidential speeches, one can hear these devout thinkers saying to themselves: does it really not matter that the person pronouncing them is without confessional commitments of his own?

Lasch was controversial when he lived, and he remains subject to strong and divided opinion long after his death. The fact that he combined a respect for Freud with a love of the Puritans is the least of it. He became a radical just as a new radicalism in America was about to be born, but he would always have an ambivalent relationship with the younger leftists who came after him. His populistic sensibilities became stronger over time, but so did his ties to the elite worlds of academia and opinion journalism. His appreciation for the common man was married to a disdain for mass culture. Lasch was a pioneer historian of the family, but feminists hated—that is not too strong a term—his nostalgia for the nuclear one. It is common to say, as Miller does in his biography, that Lasch simply did not fit into the traditional categories of left and right. But that is because Lasch really did not fit anywhere. He was a genuine American original.

So Lasch is owed his due and Miller is the right person to provide it. Although at times a bit heavy-handed in its insistence on the religious themes in Lasch's work, Miller's biography is as thorough as it is thoughtful. This is anything but a quickly written effort to explore the relationship between a thinker and his times. Miller has not only dug deeply, he has also pondered carefully. Lasch's writings always fascinated me: I looked forward to each of his books, expecting to encounter a writer willing to discuss the most serious of themes in ways that resonated among large numbers of his fellow citizens—and a writer who would provoke me into flabbergasting disagreement in the process. I never met the man, but thanks to this book I now feel that I have. I could not be more grateful to Miller for facilitating the introduction.

II.

Some people are born to be writers, and Lasch was one of them. His parents made their living with words, and had many connections to famous writers: before she married Robert, Zora had lived with Willa Cather's sister and found the famous novelist "rather patronizing, certainly not conducive to any warm regard on my part." Kit Lasch, too, lived in proximity with literature: for three years he roomed at Harvard with John Updike, another chronicler of the American obsessions with sex, social class, ambition, and faith. Lasch would never be as good a literary critic as he was a social critic. "I think his stuff lacks perception and doesn't go very deep," he reported to his parents about Updike. "He is primarily a humorist. As he himself admits, he is probably a hack. At least he has more of a hack in him than a profound artist." It was by no means obvious that a child of the populist Midwest would choose the most prestigious private university in the country for his education, but Lasch was too precocious for any Big Ten school. His mentors at Harvard were quick to discern his talent: Donald Meyer, his tutor there, compared discovering Lasch among his students to Leo Durocher learning that Willie Mays would be his center fielder.

Lasch went directly to Columbia University, the best department in American history at that time, to pursue his doctorate. Meyer's role at Harvard was assumed at Columbia by William E. Leuchtenburg. But the real influence on Lasch would prove to be the man to whom he would so often be compared: Richard Hofstadter. For Lasch, Columbia was a tougher nut to crack: he failed his first attempt at his qualifying examinations for the doctorate. But his skills were recognized and before long he was on his way, teaching at Williams and completing with astonishing speed the dissertation that resulted in his first book, *American Liberals and the Russian Revolution*. Rejected by the University of Chicago Press, it was eventually published by Columbia in 1962. It printed 1,500 copies, and 807 were sold by 1964. The only royalty check that Lasch received for the book was for $23.73. But Lasch followed three years later with *The New Radicalism in America*, the breakthrough book that established him, while still in his thirties, as one of the most promising historians in the country.

Both books inaugurated his lifelong argument with liberalism. The dissertation relied heavily on George F. Kennan and Reinhold Niebuhr to attack liberals for their naïve belief that men such as Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin were somehow on the side of virtue; already in his early work one can see in Lasch the skepticism toward progress that would mark his later writings. *The New Radicalism in America* took a somewhat different tack, but sailed in the same direction. Here Lasch wrote brief biographical portraits of the leading intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Mabel Dodge Luhan, Lincoln Steffens, and Randolph Bourne. He chose them, he said, because they put culture and not politics at the center of their concerns. While Lasch found much to admire in them, he also worried that in cutting themselves off from their country they downplayed the intellect in favor of the latest crusade. It was a work of history, but Lasch brought it up to his own era with scathing comments about such figures as Norman Mailer and the liberals around the Kennedy White House. "You will be interested to know," Arthur Schlesinger Jr. wrote Richard Rovere, "that a smart aleck kid named Christopher Lasch (son of Bob Lasch of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*), exposes us both in a new book called *The New Radicalism in America*." Unlike our age of Limbaugh, Lasch's book appeared at a time when no one hated liberals more than leftists. Lasch, at that time, led the way.

As if to return to his Midwestern roots, Lasch's first major teaching positions were at the University of Iowa and Northwestern. Eventually he settled at the University of Rochester, joining the faculty in 1970 and remaining there until his death. Miller, who is stronger on the intellectual trajectory of Lasch's work than on the details of his personal life, explores in fascinating fashion his complex relationship with Eugene Genovese, who recruited Lasch to Rochester. Both men were the same age, and shared (at the time) the same Marxist politics, and would move eventually to the right. But in his temperament Genovese strongly resembled the Russian Marxists about whom Lasch had warned in his first book. Steely and suspicious whatever his political views, Genovese persuaded Lasch that the two of them could build an outstanding history department at Rochester together. It never worked out. The idea of running a department democratically was, in Genovese's view, laughable. Supported by an administration that wanted no trouble, Genovese not only drove away some of Rochester's stars, such as Herbert Gutman, he also froze Lasch's salary during the terrible inflationary years of the mid-1970s—and this in spite of Lasch's increasing fame. Meanwhile Lasch recruited top students, many of whom would go on to write well-received books of their own, and simply waited out Genovese, who eventually moved to Georgia.

As Lasch tried, in the 1970s, to give structure to his reservations about liberalism, he assigned a prominent place

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to Freud as well as Marx. The latter provided an emphasis on the tensions between social classes that would always characterize Lasch's writings, even when they took on their most conservative coloration. The former gave Lasch a reason for being sensitive to ulterior motives: if well-meaning liberals could become apologists for totalitarian tyranny, then the views of anyone could produce results quite different from those intended. It was all the rage to combine Marx and Freud during the 1960s and 1970s, and Lasch found himself reading philosophers from the Frankfurt School such as Adorno and Horkheimer, who were trying to do the same thing.

The insights that Lasch gleaned from both Marx and Freud helped to shape the arguments in the trilogy that would make him something of a household name: *Haven in a Heartless World* (1977), *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979), and *The Minimal Self* (1984). "I've written something that is guaranteed to bore and possibly offend almost every class of reader," Lasch wrote to his friend Gerald Graff about *Haven in a Heartless World*. His editor at Knopf, Ashbel Green, agreed with the boredom part: Knopf rejected the manuscript even though a book on the family from Lasch had been under contract. Finally accepted by Basic Books, it proved to be something of a publishing sensation. Praised by George Gilder in *National Review* as "shrewd and brilliant," the book infuriated New Leftists and especially feminists.

Lasch's purpose in this book was not to blame women for the collapse of the traditional family; he was still enough of a Marxist to point his finger at capitalism and its apologists for America's high divorce rates and unhappy children. But he also left no doubt that in his view feminism was, if not the cause, then at least the symptom of family decline. Social critics thrive because so much is wrong with society that one can always find targets aplenty. The case against Lasch was not that his targets were innocent, but that his indictments were selective. Those to the left of Lasch asked: why blame people whose primary commitments were to greater equality and autonomy? But for Lasch, calling attention to the role of the advocates of personal liberation was precisely the point. As gloomy as Lasch's analysis was, he seemed to take special pleasure in going after those whose views were shaped by the 1960s, and the latter had no trouble detecting his animus.

With *The Culture of Narcissism*, also rejected by Knopf, Lasch broke out of debates within academic circles to make his mark on national politics. *Time* and *Newsweek* wrote about it. *People* featured Lasch along with Olivia Newton-John. Within four months of publication, 45,000 copies were sold. Not nearly as much a work of intellectual history as his previous books, this book explored such concerns as aging, schooling, advertising, managerialism, and even sports, the last of which received a chapter of its own. (Lasch was not a funny man, but this chapter included what I regard as his best witticism: his definition of sport as "the utmost concentration of purpose, on behalf of activities utterly useless.") This was the perfect book for its time. It was morbidly clever, brilliantly on target, idiosyncratically compelling. It deserved its status as a best seller and lifted (for a time) the prospects for all serious nonfiction writers to reach larger audiences. Allan Bloom, among others, would follow where Lasch had led.

The most historically significant readers of *The Culture of Narcissism* proved to be Jody Powell and Patrick Caddell, who were working in the Carter White House. Much has been written about Jimmy Carter's "malaise" speech and Lasch's role in it (including a recent book by Kevin Mattson, "*What the Heck Are You Up To, Mr. President*"), and Miller's treatment of the episode is somewhat disappointing. He faithfully records Lasch's unhappiness with the speech. Although he could hardly help noticing how much Carter had borrowed from him, Lasch felt that "the ideas were torn out of context and came across as moral denunciations of selfishness," and he fired off a seven-page memo to Caddell outlining his concerns. (In 1980, Lasch would vote for the hopeless campaign of Barry Commoner.) Miller takes Lasch's side in all this, but it is not difficult to imagine hard-boiled political pros coming to the conclusion that Lasch, having made his contribution, was too unreliable and needed to be dumped. That's how politics works. A chronicler of fads should know when his time has passed. Anyway, intellectuals, even "public intellectuals," do not do their finest work for politicians.

It was certainly a boon for the republic of letters that any ambitions Lasch may have had for direct political influence were quashed. Miller correctly points out that Lasch was at his best when he wrote as a member in good standing of the intellectual class directing his fire against people very much like himself. I am not sure how much Americans in general benefited from Lasch's secular sermons, but those who toil in the vineyard of ideas unquestionably did. The years in which Lasch's trilogy appeared were accompanied by significant intellectual posturing in America: an irresponsible and jargon-filled form of postmodernism began to dominate the humanities, leaving a romantic and reckless neoconservatism to take over the White House. Agree or disagree with Lasch, he sustained a fierce integrity and love of argument at a time when all too much thinking was becoming calcified and doctrinaire. (He appeared often in these pages in those years.) The further removed from politics Lasch was, the richer were his thoughts. "Neither the Right nor the Left addresses the overwhelming question of our time, the question of limits," he wrote in the London *Daily Telegraph* in 1986, adding that "the problems confronting us are cultural and spiritual rather than political." In those few words Lasch outlined the course his intellectual trajectory would take in the remaining years of his life.

The True and Only Heaven, Lasch's longest and most serious book, appeared in 1991, and addressed head-on the question of limits. The title was lifted from Hawthorne, and signified the extent to which Lasch had chosen to write in the spirit of Puritan New England. The book defies summation: Lasch took on so many thinkers from so many eras—the Scotsmen Adam Smith and Thomas Carlyle, the founders of this magazine, Dr. Spock, the anti-busing activist Louise Day Hicks—as to leave readers gasping at the sheer chutzpah of his ambition. But underlying it all was a deep transformation in Lasch's own thinking. Marx and Freud were out, populism and Calvinism were in. And if the former combination led to the Frankfurt School and Wilhelm Reich, the latter enabled Lasch to finally come to terms with Richard Hofstadter. "I've come to see Hofstadter as a latter-day version of H. L. Mencken endlessly belaboring the 'booboisie,'" Lasch wrote to his former student (and now professor of history at Columbia) Casey Blake. It was a shrewd if cruel comment. Hofstadter was the quintessential New York intellectual, appreciative of modernity, skeptical of religion, in love with cosmopolis. Lasch, by now the anti-Hofstadter, turned all that on its head. For all their differences, populists and Calvinists were both suspicious of progress, which is why Lasch loved them both.

"It is almost impossible to read *True and Only Heaven*, especially at a fifteen-year remove from its publication," Miller writes, "and not see in it a work of pro-

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found scholarship." He is right. Those fifteen years have brought us, among other treasures, the blog; and while I appreciate the energy and the combativeness of today's form of intellectual debate, turning back to Lasch's magnum opus reminds one that progress in the way ideas are conveyed is just as much a mixed blessing as progress in the ideas that are conveyed. Who cannot love Lasch's combination of learning, passion, stylistic flair, engagement with the largest of themes, and fearless hectoring? And at such length? I can think of no writer today who combines erudition with passion the way Lasch did.

In February 1992, thirteen months after *The True and Only Heaven* appeared, Lasch learned that he had cancer. Although he would continue to write (some books were published posthumously), his life's work was done. Over a thirty-year span, he had published eight major books, any one of which would have constituted a significant achievement. It is fitting that he died much as he thought. "I despise the cowardly clinging to life, purely for the sake of life, that seems so deeply ingrained in the American temperament," he told one of his doctors. Like Hume, who on philosophical grounds refused to be converted on his deathbed, Lasch was willing to apply his living insights to his dying days. The last word on his life should be left to his father. "You have a staggering record of accomplishment in a worthwhile calling" is how Robert said goodbye to his son. "You do not need a divinely fashioned grand design to justify your life."

III.

Eric Miller deals mostly with Lasch's life. What about his legacy? On that question, we cannot let the religious thinkers who adopted him have the last word. Of Lasch's verve and reach, there can be no doubt. Of his relevance to the years that followed, the matter remains open.

The issue that preoccupied his critics even when Lasch was in his prime was whether his anger led him to exaggerations that made his conclusions untrustworthy. The passage of time, I believe, validates those critics more than Lasch. Miller faithfully gives the criticisms. Mark Edmundson, for example, characterized *The True and Only Heaven* as "little more than a bitter screed against liberal yuppies, a highbrow version of what the popular press has been working at sporadically over the past decade.... The only passages that hum with any kind of life—even if it's a rather repugnant life—are passages of denunciation in which Lasch chains himself up on the rock and derides the objects of his current rancor." Such were the pyrotechnics that Lasch could provoke. Edmundson gives Lasch too little credit for his insights into intellectual history, but he is right about the tone. No matter what the subject, Lasch saw nothing but decline.

There are only a limited number of ways one can improve on Increase Mather, and by the end of his life Lasch had run out of them. Miller's biography shows that Lasch never seemed to understand the effects of his own venom. It was not just that he felt misunderstood by Jimmy Carter. Lasch loved to attack, but he always seemed surprised that the objects of his attack fought back. In his own mind, he was the courageous teller of truths that no one wanted to hear; and so his critics must have been engaged in a prolonged effort at denial, at misreading him as a way to escape their responsibility for the damage that their own ideas had caused. "If you talk about the growing tensions that so often seem to characterize relations between men and women, it's assumed that you want women to return to the kitchen," Lasch complained to friends. But whether or not he wanted

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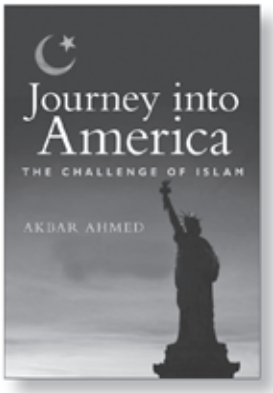

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women confined to cooking, he clearly wanted to make it more difficult for them to divorce their husbands or to pay as much attention to their careers as to their children. Perhaps Lasch's feminist critics sensed in *Haven in a Heartless World* the attitudes that Lasch would later express in a *Harper's* forum. When asked how the Bill of Rights should be rewritten to account for the contemporary condition, he responded with a proposed article that included this: "No state shall pass laws authorizing divorce for any but the weightiest reasons. In the case of couples with children under the age of twenty-one, divorce is hereby forbidden." Feminists, Lasch wrote to another friend, "willfully and maliciously distorted" his thinking. To me it seems that they understood his views pretty well.

From the vantage point of today, it is possible to detect an even more serious flaw in Lasch's choice of targets. Lasch was engaged in an endless war against the leftism of the 1960s when the true enemy of American traditionalism would turn out to be the radical right—one of the persistent objects of Hofstadter's attention—that came to power after his death. To be sure, Lasch was absolutely right in insisting upon the narcissistic strain in American culture. But what public figure today can possibly compete with Sarah Palin for the title of the most narcissistic personality of our times? (Lasch would no doubt respond by describing Palin's prominence as an ironic consequence of feminism's influence.) Compared to the catastrophic irresponsibility of Wall Street practices, or Republican nostalgia for the Confederacy, or the blatant unconstitutionality of much of the Bush and Cheney years, the harm done to the United States by leftwing elitists in the 1970s begins to pale. Lasch confused the counterculture with permanent revolution. The extremes that provoked him were quickly recognized, even by some of their protagonists, as overheated and dangerous, and the radicalism of the 1970s eventually receded or corrected itself. But the reactionary conservatism that we witness today, by contrast, will never learn to say it is sorry.

All of which leads to Lasch's single most important miscalculation. From start to finish, his enemy was liberalism. What was implicit in his first books became explicit to the point of caricature in his later writings. The liberal order, he wrote in 1983, "should have collapsed a long time ago," because it could not propose a "theory of the good society" and was therefore doomed to become "a politics of mass media." Blaming liberals for Ronald Reagan was little different, or more plausible, than blaming feminists for family decline. Focused on the left in which he had grown up and come to political maturity, Lasch turned to populism in his final books just as conservatives discovered how to turn popular anger into a maelstrom of negativity. So it must be affirmed that against the ignorant conspiratorialism of today's right, liberalism's theory of the good society, however thin, looks downright robust. "His public invective in the mid-eighties against liberalism—which he certainly hoped was not resurgent—was as harsh as ever," Miller points out. "He rarely gave either the political tradition or movement any sort of blessing." Had Lasch been less misanthropic, he might have been more perceptive.

Miller identifies so strongly with his subject that he accepts Lasch's judgment that he was crucified on a cross of misunderstanding. He finds Lasch's critics smug and condescending. They treated him, Miller concludes, "as someone to keep at arm's length—a quirky and dangerous fellow who at some point along the way had taken a frightening wrong turn." The problem is that Lasch *did* take a wrong turn—and it was precisely the turn toward secular Calvinism that Miller praises. It is one thing to admire Jonathan Edwards and to lament the fact that we no longer take theology seriously—I myself love to assign Edwards to my students; but a historian, of all people, should have recognized that however valuable an appreciation of our depraved nature may have been in one era, it may cause significant injury in another. Yes, progressive history—the idea that each era is better than the one that precedes it—clearly fails to do justice to the sheer contingency of human life. But so does Lasch's insistence that everything is for the worst in this worst of all possible worlds.

In the end even Miller, who is so admiring of Lasch, feels that something did not quite hold together in his worldview. "Lasch," he concludes, needed "a more full, complete, rich tradition than 'populism,' one that extended well beyond the public political sphere to touch and form mind and heart." But Lasch confounded his faithful admirers just as he did his leftist critics; he knew about the realm of God to which Miller alludes and did not want any part of it—at least for himself. The great diagnostician of our rootlessness never found his own roots. Lasch did not like modernity, but he was modernity's child. We must be thankful that we live in a society sufficiently mobile, alienated, elitist, and skeptical to have produced such a man. ◆

David Thomson
"YOU USED TO BE IN PICTURES!"

STAR:
HOW WARREN BEATTY
SEDUCED AMERICA
By Peter Biskind
(Simon & Schuster, 627 pp., $30)

Warren Beatty has not done a lot for us lately. *Town and Country*, his last movie, was nine years ago. The absence is such that some of his old associates have concluded that he may be happy at last. But I doubt that such a hope lingered more than a few seconds: Beatty's entire act has been the epitome of dissatisfaction. Another possibility is that one of the world's habitual manipulators now faces his greatest challenge: his own children, three girls and a boy, ranging in age from seventeen to nine and not lacking for genes, limo-lore, and the chance to pick up dad's telephone technique. With his kids, Beatty might be in the meeting of his life. In which case he should do whatever he can to keep Peter Biskind's book out of the house.

Still, Biskind and his publisher have elected to call the book *Star*—without an exclamation mark, but with a cover photograph that must be forty years old. Now, America in 2010, given a book called *Star*, is not going to make an obvious connection with Warren Beatty. So it is overreaching of Biskind—it may even be daft—to add the subtitle, "How Warren Beatty Seduced America." Seduced? Yes. America? No.

I know we have our troubles as a nation and a culture, but there is an uneasy part of this book where the biographer's calculations lead him to propose, in a spirit of quantitative research, that Beatty may

David Thomson is the author of The New Biographical Dictionary of Film. The enlarged and updated fifth edition will be published by Knopf in the fall.

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have had more than 12,775 women in his time. We must grant that this precision is awkward and delicate, and understand that you had to be there to establish whether there was a there there. (Biskind is a measured judge: his five-figure number "does not include daytime quickies, drive-by blowjobs, casual gropings, stolen kisses, and so on." Clear?) I am not dismissing Biskind's insinuation—I think he knows his subject pretty well—that Beatty may have dreamed of seducing or enthralling America, but, honestly, this fear of current pandemic is silliness. At best, in 2010, we have in Beatty a wry, lonely recluse, perhaps depressed, who watches his children, or watches them watching him. It is out of order to speak of him seducing America. The person he meant to seduce—his only worthy target until *les enfants*—was himself; whereas the nation, the dark fields of the republic made darker by drive-by blowjobs, turned its back on Warren Beatty maybe as long ago as *Ishtar* in 1987. Ever since then, major-league seduction has been entrusted to people with more stamina and less neurotic impediment—men such as Barack Obama and George Clooney.

Not that Beatty was ever uninteresting. He was born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1937, which is to say, in the South when it was rigidly segregated. He was the child of liberals of Scots-Canadian descent. The father had a variety of jobs—realtor, teacher, school principal—but never really settled down. The mother raised him to play music: the young Beatty was a hip piano player, a deft imitator of Errol Garner and Art Tatum. No one ever noticed his own style. It was just that he hunched over the keys until people began to ask about that good-looking kid at the piano. In his very long book, Biskind does not explore the family and the upbringing, and that's a pity. Beatty himself has admitted to being raised by women, a group that included his older sister Shirley MacLaine, as flamboyant a performer as he has always been a guarded one.

So he came of age in the '50s, very good-looking but a virgin apparently. He did a year at Northwestern, then dropped out and went to New York to act. This was the moment when Montgomery Clift did *A Place in the Sun* and *From Here to Eternity*, Brando made *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *On the Waterfront*, James Dean died, and Paul Newman took over some of the roles intended for Dean. Beatty was not slow. He took some classes with Stella Adler, and he did a play in New York, *A Loss of Roses* by William Inge, a melancholy homosexual who clearly longed to have Beatty as a lover. That never happened, but Beatty used the ties to Inge to get the lead in a movie from an Inge story, *Splendor in the Grass*, to be directed by Elia Kazan, a guide and teacher to Brando, Clift, and Dean, the pathfinder director in America at that moment.

Beatty had little training and less experience. If the camera loved him from the start, he gave every sign of being ready to reciprocate. I'm not sure that a more resolute self-love has ever faced the world or its cameras. And while Beatty could do guy-sheepishness, he knew inwardly that he merited attention. In so many ways he gave the lead in that self-study. I share Biskind's suspicion that this confidence was assembled at the cost of psychic damage, and an inability to engage with life or other people without contrived advantage.

He made an impact: he was very good as the all-American kid facing sex in *Splendor in the Grass*, and he and Kazan helped draw a better and more reckless performance from Natalie Wood in the female lead. Beatty's virginity had been lost (though I suspect he feels he clings to a part of it forever). The Southern boy was now to be seen with famous women: he nearly married Joan Collins—just saying that out loud suggests how long ago this was. He had an affair with Natalie Wood, and now his sexuality was open in a way that made openness notorious if a little clerical. 12,775? 20,000? 30,000? It's a game, or a racing circuit with corners and tearaway straights that were named for Leslie Caron, Julie Christie, Michelle Phillips, Diane Keaton, Isabelle Adjani, and so on. You can feel Biskind's squeamishness about the list, and I share it, but no publisher would condone discretion—and Beatty might sue if a book suggested a lack of generosity on his part. So let me add that while the young actor showed an eye and more for actresses who had Oscar as a beau, he was always an equal-opportunity liberal: the girls did not have to be famous. They did not have to be ravishing beauties or golden minds. They had merely to be there.

Biskind develops a nice riff about the actress-lovers who reached a point where they could not bear to look Beatty in the eye during the filming of a scene. They had seen something amiss—something like the way he used them as mirrors. Carly Simon nailed him, in 1972, with her taunting lyric, "I bet you think this song is about you." Biskind takes that idea further, to the point where everything in the world reminded Beatty of himself. Was this narcissism, or solipsism? Grant that he was the victim of both, and you may foresee the lurching progress of his career.

He never worked steadily, though when he worked it was furiously, in a way that imprisoned everyone around in his neurosis. He was inclined to be in charge of the whole film, as if not quite trusting or crediting the work of others. Time and again with writers, he emerged believing he had done the work. That frenzy came after *Bonnie and Clyde*. But first, in the 1960s, he did *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (with Vivien Leigh), giving an enjoyable bad performance such as exposed his lack of craft. Then three times in a row—*All Fall Down*, *Lilith*, and *Mickey One*—he played unlikeable guys out of love with themselves. The struggle was palpable, and all three films are more interesting than Biskind cares to see. *Mickey One* is deeply pretentious (so was Beatty). *All Fall Down* was a portrait of a cold user. And in *Lilith*, with Jean Seberg (she *is* the film), he played a mental nurse who ends up knowing he needs treatment himself.

Splendor in the Grass did well at the box office. It had rentals of over $4 million. But no other Beatty film had turned a profit. There was every sign that audiences were suspicious of him—just as journalists had determined that he was a pain in the ass. So by 1967, Beatty was not too far from a terminal pretty-boy condition, and he knew it. But he was also smart, well connected, and ready to take a big risk; and those urges flowered in *Bonnie and Clyde*, the one film of greatness that Beatty has ever been involved with. It was a script by Robert Benton and David Newman, done in the manner of Truffaut, whom they adored. The script fell into Beatty's hands and he resolved to produce it and to star in it. He had the wisdom to ask Arthur Penn (who had made *Mickey One*) to direct it. Biskind stresses that *Bonnie and Clyde* was Beatty's production, but I think he misses how far the film's sensuousness and mixed feelings about violence came from Penn.

Bonnie and Clyde was a '30s genre picture turned into a chic text for the angry '60s—the sex, the violence, and the outrage at banks were part of a new subversive energy; the clothes, the music, and the idea of motel holdup artists were all from Texas in the early '30s. This story has been told many times—but it is true. Working on location, sparing no one, Beatty brought in a New Wave film that he had to defend against its stupid studio (Warner Brothers). He carried the film

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all over the field. He overcame disapproving reviews and poor box office. He willed it to be a hit—the domestic rentals were about ten times the budget. As actor, producer, and everyman on the film, he walked away rich, at the age of thirty.

There was much to love in the film if you were part of the young audience—the comedy used as mocking bandage for death; the chase music; the spilling energy of the performances (that was Penn); the ripe pout on Faye Dunaway's face; and Beatty's dazed, chump-like way of telling Clyde's hard-luck story—how he chopped off a couple of toes days before being released from prison. "Ain't life grand?" he sighed, and it was real acting. People loved Clyde being a fool; it erased Beatty's supercilious edge. It was a travesty that *Bonnie and Clyde* won Oscars only for photography (by the veteran Burnett Guffey, who thought Beatty was a jerk) and for Estelle Parsons (as Clyde's sister-in-law). It should have had best picture, best director, and best actor—they went instead to *In the Heat of the Night*, Mike Nichols (for *The Graduate*), and Rod Steiger (for *In the Heat of the Night*). There is no reason to be startled at the Academy's foolishness: that is its exemplary function. But in 1967, Hollywood didn't like Beatty either. He was a dangerous smart-ass in a world where stars strove to be lovable and ordinary. After all, Ronald Reagan was the emerging archetype.

In the 1970s Beatty had love affairs, he lived in hotels, he got heavily involved in Democratic politics, he began a friendship with Gary Hart that would help to ruin Hart, and he made a few films. Some were wrecks—*The Only Game in Town*, *Dollars*, *The Parallax View* (the one to grieve over), *The Fortune*. There were also three others—*McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, *Shampoo*, and *Heaven Can Wait*. As the years pass, *McCabe* may challenge *Bonnie and Clyde* as Beatty's best picture. It is a Robert Altman downer on which Altman out-maneuvered Beatty the control freak, exposed his naughty-boy act and turned him into a fumbling, accident-prone antihero. Clyde Barrow gets famous. He has his story told, and the girl sharp enough to do it also gives him a sexual climax. Thank you, ma'am! But John McCabe is a strange outsider whose rare courage goes unnoticed by the town. It is buried in the snow and the mournful drifts of the Leonard Cohen songs. This is a rich, mature film that keeps growing. Biskind gives a good account of how Altman won the power battle on it and took every unfair advantage of Beatty.

In a way, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* was training for *Shampoo*, a strange warning in which Beatty consented to a film about himself. Originally, this was a project for Robert Towne, a talented if neurotic writer whom Beatty had used as a personal script doctor on *Bonnie and Clyde*. Towne wrote *Shampoo* and then felt that Beatty had taken over the script. (Biskind is very good on this tortuous game.) This was tragic, but it was comic, too, and it had to do with Beatty's helpless assurance that this film was about him (in the guise of a Beverly Hills hairdresser who screws his heads). *Shampoo* is brave and very funny, as lazily sexy as L.A. in the '70s, sad and very untidy. Today you can still see how with a tougher edge it might have been a masterpiece. Towne and Beatty (talents that needed each other) came away thinking they had both been exploited.

As for *Heaven Can Wait*, a remake of the 1940s hit *Here Comes Mr. Jordan*, try seeing it now. For the first time, Beatty took co-director credit, with Buck Henry, who is one of the liveliest and most ironic voices in this book. The film did very well, and Beatty was nominated for best picture, best director, and best actor. (Biskind recalls that this triple matches one person only—Orson Welles—on a thing called *Citizen Kane*. Factually, this is true. Spiritually, it is grotesque.) *Heaven Can Wait* is fluffy and vapid. It made a lot of money and shamed the raider who had done *Bonnie and Clyde*. Not that he noticed.

Whereupon Beatty did everything again on *Reds*. The first part of that film (it was so long that it required an intermission) is well done, well written, and well played—a pretty Masterpiece Theatre sketch of America in the age of Bolshevism and free love, in which the radiant, ancient witnesses become the most moving thing in sight. But the second part of the film, the one that shows the Russian Revolution, is a prolonged mess in which the attempt at a failed love story cannot smooth out the intractable arguments of leftist infighting.

Beatty believed that it was courageous of him to revisit America's infant redness in the age of Reagan. He spent years and millions—no one knows quite how many—in a capitalist celebration of a socialist, and never seemed to notice the abyss at his feet. It is impossible in hindsight to believe that he really cared for John Reed as anything other than a flag to wave. *Reds* has not a political nerve in its complacent body. It is a Hollywood picture about issues that are impossible to follow. Again, Beatty got the triple nomination. He won for best director—another hollow Academy joke, if you believe that Beatty has never had much feeling for the movement and rhythm of movies such as made the nervous system of Arthur Penn or Jean Renoir. A producer? Yes. But as a director he makes Clint "You Work Until You Die" Eastwood look like Hemingway.

And after *Reds*, he rested. There was a six-year gap before his next film, *Ishtar*, a famous disaster. And since *Ishtar*, Beatty has done *Dick Tracy*, *Bugsy*, *Love Affair*, *Bulworth*, and *Town and Country*. He married Annette Bening and had children with her. He added the Irving Thalberg award to his directing Oscar. Now he has seemed eager to be regarded as an elder statesman in that kingdom called Hollywood—which, in truth, is a state of broken abandon.

What is to be said about those last five films? Biskind makes it clear that the production of all of them was an ordeal in which Beatty behaved increasingly badly, usurped the power of others, and indulged a chronic habit of shooting take after take to no good end. *Dick Tracy* was a hit, but so expensive that Jeffrey Katzenberg asked out loud whether a hit like that was worth having. It was pretty but empty. *Bugsy* was a real film, but its flaw may lie in its central performance, in which Beatty is unsure whether to be monstrous or charming. Biskind is a bigger fan than I can be: the political "idealism" in which unbridled ego invents Las Vegas is surely suspect from the start. *Love Affair* and *Town and Country* were disasters akin to *Ishtar*. And *Bulworth*? That is still going, like *McCabe & Mrs Miller*. It ends feebly, as if given up on by its makers, but the first half is political satire of a high order, as well as a subterfuge as good at piercing America's prim defenses as *Bonnie and Clyde*. It was once believed by others that Beatty should run for some kind of office. He could have been a contender. (Look who the governor of California is, for God's sake.) He may have been chilled off by the feeling that he only wanted to be a winner.

And so Biskind's book ends, in most ways, with Beatty's marriage to Bening. This is as regrettable as it is mysterious. Biskind reports one guideline he never wavered from (he did have conversations with Beatty, though he admits how closed down they might be): "I decided that anything of a personal nature that occurred after he and Annette Bening married was off limits, because I didn't want to be in a position of writing anything that might embarrass them or their four children."

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That is pious and disingenuous. There are things in this book about Beatty's romantic life that will make some readers squirm and may alarm the children. Alas, Bening never really figures in the book. I say alas, because she is unusually intelligent and may be a better actress than her record shows. If we are still interested in Beatty after five hundred pages—and I must say that after that many pages the reader must make a big effort to stomach his relentless controlling urges—then his transforming marriage and his fatherhood deserved attention.

Biskind believes in Beatty's "extraordinary body of work." My feelings are more mixed. And Biskind leaves Beatty wondering whether to make the Howard Hughes film that he has considered for decades. Are we living in the same world, author and reader? Beatty is seventy-three this year. Howard Hughes was seventy when he died. There was a time when the odd spell of Howard Hughes may have carried a necromantic allure—if we are to believe in a mouldering neurotic who knows enough about life for his fears to be tragic. Anyway, a far more energetic and decisive director—Martin Scorsese—has already done a version of Hughes in *The Aviator*, which never gathered rentals to match its cost, and left every impression that Hughes's last years were a life not worth living, let alone watching.

I don't believe that Beatty can any longer muster the will or the money for a geriatric vanity. One of the failings in *Star* is that it does not follow the money tightly enough. Beatty came into pictures starting at zero: his family had no unusual means. He made himself wealthy, but he became a big loser of studio money over the years. Biskind says that sometimes Beatty had to act and to direct so as to make a project financially sustainable. But I would need to know the details to have the case proved: money is always in the details. Beatty had a halcyon moment, from the late '60s until the late '70s, when studios craved his presence. Today those studios barely exist. The sums of money are beyond reach. I doubt that there is a studio left (or an audience) that would pay a dollar for Beatty to pretend to be anyone.

This sort of creative challenge existed once. It may remind some readers of Orson Welles, who spent time on *Citizen Kane* playing with the idea of what he might look like in old age. Repeatedly, *Star* describes the pains taken by Beatty to protect his perishing looks as shooting went on. He was fanatically protective of the image he nursed of himself, whereas Welles, even at twenty-five, was possessed by a cheerful self-destructiveness. Welles had ego, but he was willing to look like death if it furthered a film. Beatty has smothered himself and his creativity by trying to stay young. One of the great things about *Citizen Kane* is that its vision (the exultant gaze of a brilliant kid) is shaded by glimpses of an eventual failure and solitude. Welles had a rueful foreboding that made his youthfulness seem all the more vibrant. Beatty, by contrast, was a sultry kid, baleful, dangerously without humor, and asleep in dreams of himself.

Warren Beatty is an emblem for our last cluster of male movie stars: he is the same age as Jack Nicholson, Robert Redford, and Dustin Hoffman, and near enough to Al Pacino and Robert De Niro. All of them have lived beyond the natural span of their own stardom. There is a sadness about them now. De Niro and Pacino work on—and on—and their new films are, now more than ever, ordeals. Nicholson has said that he is washed up on the shore beyond the tide-line of good scripts. Redford seems as lost and as vacant as ever. Stars are not necessarily self-aware or intelligent, but once they shone. Now these vets huddle together in soft-focus, in scenes that use doubles.

Star is expert reporting but grinding to read, and it bespeaks an oppressive interest in movieland maneuvers. But it shows why, once upon a time—before AIDS, before Polanski, before special effects and monster budgets—a great-looking guy with his wits about him might think it would be fun to make a movie. And so it was, even if fun is a boy's sport. Now the fun has gone out of American film. The rush of celluloid no longer lives and moves or believes in its own ninety-minute sensation. It isn't even celluloid, and it's never ninety minutes. Warren Beatty begins to seem like Norma Desmond. ◆

Jaroslaw Anders
THE WIZARD

ADAM MICKIEWICZ: THE LIFE OF A ROMANTIC
By Roman Koropeckyj
(Cornell University Press, 549 pp., $45)

It was Poland's peculiar luck to receive its literary matrix, its cultural subtext, the source of its national mythology, from the hands of a provincial genius, a Romantic poet and mystic, in the first half of the nineteenth century. Imagine the creative possibilities, and the inevitable perils, of such a provenance. I can almost smell the floor wax in my old school in Warsaw and hear the thirteen-syllable couplets rolling gently like ripples on a vast, calm lake through all twelve books of *Pan Tadeusz*, which was introduced by our teacher as "the Polish national epic" that captured all the Polish virtues—chivalry, courage, patriotism, compassion. It was written, he taught us, by Adam Mickiewicz, who was not only "the greatest Polish poet of all time" but also a *wieszcz*—an archaic Polish word denoting wizard, soothsayer, bard, and prophet, all rolled into one.

In fact, *Master Thaddeus* is a rather silly Dumas-like adventure story about a feud between two noble families that finally overcome their differences in the face of a common Russian enemy. The poem is riddled with the clichés of adventure narratives: castles with dungeons, duels, concealed identities, mortal sins confessed on a deathbed, a young gentleman's agonizing choice between a worldly coquette and an innocent angel. And so we jaded fifteen-year-olds thought that we were a bit too advanced for all that. Besides, the country in the poem was called Lithuania, not Poland—and if you really cared to check, it was set in what is now Belarus, and in my school days was the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. What is more, the Poles (or whoever they were) portrayed in the epic did not seem particularly pleasant. They were quarrelsome, short-tempered, vindictive, given to drink, and often quite dumb. And was killing the wounded, comical Russian officer in his sickbed really a chivalrous act? Was it smart to start a little Polish-Russian war because said officer, having come to the rescue of a Polish family harassed by its neighbors, wanted to dance with a Polish lady?

And yet there was something in the flow of the images in Mickiewicz's epic poem, the persistence of rhyme, the not-infrequent comic relief, that transformed this crude and rather violent story into a

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pastoral idyll in which everything was exactly as it should be, everything and everybody was perfect, death had no dominion, and in the end all will be forgiven—neighborly squabbles, ancient trespasses, lovers' distress, and even the incredible naïveté of the tale. It was through *Master Thaddeus* that many of us first experienced poetry, and it was good.

Still, why the aura of near-religious veneration that surrounds this work, the lump in the nation's throat and the tear in the nation's eye? We were told to worship Mickiewicz because our parents worshipped him, and their parents before them. They used to memorize his verses and they found in them answers to life's most important questions. Moreover, the situations described in his works had a strange way of repeating themselves again and again in the nation's history. We were raised on the belief that Adam Mickiewicz somehow managed to express the deepest secrets and the innermost yearnings of the Polish soul. But was this really true, and if so, why? How does one become a *wieszcz*? Why do we need a *wieszcz*, when other nations seem to do perfectly well with mere poets? And what precisely are we supposed to do with our *wieszcz*?

There is no question that Mickiewicz is a pivotal figure in Polish literature. He is a key to the Polish mentality, if only because many Poles choose to believe so. But he is also a mystery and a dilemma. He was a complex and paradoxical figure, even by Romantic standards, and his relevance and impact on Polish literary culture is still a subject of heated debate. In Polish literary criticism, the many questions that surround his life and his work are often referred to as "the Mickiewicz enigma." For foreign readers, the enigma is compounded by the fact that there are practically no translations into any of the major languages that do justice to his poetic imagination and his poetic language.

And until now there was no good contemporary biography of Mickiewicz in English. Roman Koropeckyj's long but highly readable, almost novelistic, account of the poet's life fills this gap. Without trying to solve the "Mickiewicz enigma," it eruditely and intelligently reveals the many strands of the story—personal and historical—that gradually transformed the poet into a larger-than-life figure, until (as Koropeckyj writes in the introduction) the name of Mickiewicz "served as a point of reference whenever the survival of the Polish nation was at stake, and whenever ideas about its fate needed legitimation."

Adam Mickiewicz was born on December 24, 1798, in the hamlet of Zaosie, near a town that the Poles called Nowogrodek, and the Russians called Novogrudok, and the Lithuanians called Naugardukas, which is today Navahrudak in eastern Belarus. For centuries, the area belonged to the Great Duchy of Lithuania, which encompassed lands inhabited by Lithuanians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Poles, and which, together with a much smaller Kingdom of Poland further west, constituted a dual state known as the Polish Commonwealth. It was both an elective monarchy and a kind of direct participatory democracy open to all titled nobility from the Kingdom and the Duchy. Once a major European power that extended its influence over most of Central and Eastern Europe, this unique political entity declined rapidly in the eighteenth century, and finally was dismembered by its powerful neighbors, Prussia, Austria, and Russia, with much of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania falling to Russia.

Mickiewicz's family held a Polish title of nobility and spoke Polish, though they might have had mixed ethnic roots. Like most families of their class, they were steeped in rural traditions, nostalgic about the golden years of the Commonwealth, pious, patriotic, and guided by a strong sense of civic duty. They regarded themselves as both Polish and Lithuanian, though the meaning of those two terms probably had a different resonance for them. Poland was a large, unifying political idea, while Lithuania—meaning the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania—was the actual land, the people, their customs, their historical memories.

In the spring of 1812, Mickiewicz witnessed Napoleon's march on Moscow and then his disastrous retreat, which Poles experienced as yet another blow to their national aspirations. A few years earlier, having conquered the Polish lands occupied by Austria and Prussia, Napoleon restored a rump Duchy of Warsaw, and Poles, who had flocked to his banners, hoped that Napoleon's final victory over Russia would restore Poland to its former glory. Despite Bonaparte's defeat, the cult of the French emperor survived in Poland longer than in his native France, and for Mickiewicz he remained a semi-divine figure. At the end of the Napoleonic wars, the Congress of Vienna preserved the limited autonomy of the Duchy of Warsaw, now renamed the Congress Kingdom, but placed it under Russian suzerainty. Lithuania remained a Russian province, closely watched from the Russian imperial seat in St. Petersburg.

After graduating from a local Dominican gymnasium, Mickiewicz enrolled in a Polish university in Vilno, now Vilnius, where after the obligatory courses in mathematics and physical sciences—it was still the Enlightenment in this part of Europe—he devoted himself to history, classical literatures, and modern languages: French, German, and English, which helped him immerse himself in Western Romantic literature and philosophy. I imagine that life must have looked to the young and ambitious people of that time a little the way it looked in the 1970s for my own generation in communist Poland. The relatively free access to foreign ideas only heightened the frustration with our own inert and oppressive reality. The powerful need to find refuge in learning led to the hectic devouring of books and languages and all the terms of modern intellectual discourse, and to the formation of tight-knit unofficial groups in which we could feel free and relatively safe—but all along there was a nagging sense that all this cosmopolitanism was futile, that our dreams would never be fulfilled, that all that really awaited us, unless we sold out to the regime, was a schoolteacher's existence.

Vilno in the early nineteenth century witnessed a similar frenzy of self-improvement and self-organization, and Mickiewicz was one of its leaders. From his earliest days at the university he was a member of numerous circles and groups with mysterious-sounding names—the Philomaths, the Philareths, the Radiants—all of them "secret," that is, operating without the required governmental authorization. They were not much different from typical learned fraternities, except that under the Russian administration they inevitably assumed a political character. Koropeckyj observes that these young activists shared the idea that "the nation's survival depended not on pedigree, but on civic responsibility and moral uprightness, which, in turn, was a function of education." They must have believed that some day all this intellectual ferment would produce some results, although they probably did not know how or when it might happen. In the meantime, they were producing a surfeit of un-utilized knowledge and sophistication that would come to define the very notion of the Eastern European "intelligentsia." In 1822 Mickiewicz published *Ballads and Romances,* his first book of poetry. For some time he had been under the spell of the German and English Romantics, and his book was the Polish equivalent of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*—a poetic

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manifesto of the new Romantic sensibility and a challenge to the neo-classical tastes of the literary establishment.

Two years earlier, he had to accept an assignment as a teacher of Latin and history in a gymnasium in the town of Kovno, where he complained of boredom and exhaustion, and worried that his muse would be stifled by the drudgery of small-town life. Salvation came in the form of a crisis—the first of a series of crises that radically changed the course of the poet's life. In 1823, a Russian senator named Novosiltsov, trying to ingratiate himself with the emperor, started a vigorous investigation into unauthorized student activities in Vilno. Names were named and arrests followed. Mickiewicz, at the time back in Vilno on a sabbatical from his teaching job, was seized in November 1823 and imprisoned in a town cloister. At a trial, twenty dangerous "instigators" were named, Mickiewicz among them. Two colleagues took most of the blame on themselves and were sentenced to prison, followed by exile in remote Russian provinces. Mickiewicz and the others were ordered to report immediately to the empire's capital and accept appointments in the imperial government service chosen for them by the Russian authorities.

It is quite possible, as Koropeckyj suggests, that on one of his several visits to the Russian capital Mickiewicz rented an apartment in the same house as a fledgling writer from Ukraine named Mykola Hohol-Janovskii—the future Nikolai Gogol. They did not know each other then, and would meet only years later in Paris. But Mickiewicz's experiences in Russia often verged on the Gogolesque. Having summoned the Polish troublemaker to its capital, the empire obviously had no idea what to do with him, and it kept shuttling him from one fictitious position to another. From St. Petersburg Mickiewicz was ordered to go to Moscow, then to Odessa, then back to Moscow. In Odessa, he actually received a salary for holding a job that did not exist. ("They're paying us to eat oranges," he quipped in a letter.) In Moscow he was granted an official *tshin*, a civil-service rank of "district secretary" (the third-lowest in the fourteen-grade table of ranks), which gave him the right to wear a uniform and be addressed as "Your Nobleness," but was not accompanied by an appointment or a salary.

And so the dissident but suddenly respectable poet had more than enough time to play tourist and establish contacts with the Russian intellectual elite, which already included a fair number of Polonophiles. He soon became friends with two prominent Russian poets, Aleksandr Bestuzhev and Kondraty Ryleev, future conspirators in the Decembrist coup. In Moscow he was introduced to Nikolai Polevoi, a writer, publisher, critic, and all-around literary powerhouse. He met Prince Petr Viazemskii, a friend of Pushkin, and soon was spending time in the company of Pushkin himself. The story of their mutual fascination, rivalry, and bitter feud over Poland's aspirations to independence is one of the more interesting literary tales of the time.

Adam Mickiewicz, 1839

As his fame was growing, he inevitably fell within the orbit of Princess Zinaida Volkonskaya, the czar's confidante and Pushkin's "Queen of Muses and of Beauty," who reigned over one of the empire's most illustrious salons. It was the first time that Mickiewicz enjoyed warm personal relationships with so many writers and intellectuals. In Russia he was a great hit. "Now that Goethe has grown silent and Byron is no more, Mickiewicz—and of this we should be proud—is not only Poland's premier poet, but is, perhaps, the first of all poets living today," wrote Polevoi in a typically rapturous response to the publication of Mickiewicz's new poems in Polish.

It is quite possible that Russia created the Mickiewicz we know. It boosted his self-confidence and launched his international career. Russia was his first taste of a cosmopolitan, intellectually vibrant society surpassing everything he could have found in Lithuania and even Poland. Was the relative comfort of his "exile" causing him moral discomfort? After all, many of his charming, brilliant, sophisticated friends and admirers were also czarist officials, courtiers, military commanders, even spies and provocateurs—people serving the very empire that occupied his country and sent his friends to prison. If he felt any ambivalence, he was careful not to bring it up even with the most trusted Russian hosts. Viazemskii describes him as "very intelligent, well mannered, animated in conversation, with manners that were politely delicate. . . . He did not play the political martyr."

If there was a conflict in his soul, it probably found expression in Mickiewicz's long poem "Konrad Wallenrod," a strange and dark tale of a Lithuanian boy kidnapped and raised by the Teutonic Knights, who finally becomes the order's grand master. It is an almost existentialist story of identity lost and recovered, and an act of personal sacrifice that is also an act of hideous betrayal. Koropeckyj is probably right to suggest that "Konrad Wallenrod" marks the poet's first serious moral crisis, and the beginning of his transformation from a Romantic dandy into a mystic and a seeker.

After almost five years in Russia, Mickiewicz was getting restless. After the czar's refusal to let him return to Lithuania, he finally obtained permission to travel to the West, ostensibly for medical reasons. After a sentimental farewell with his Russian friends, he boarded a steamer that took him to Lübeck; and as the shores of Russia started to recede in the distance he threw overboard some Russian coins with the czar's image. (But he kept his Russian passport, the only one he would ever have.) As Koropeckyj notes, the journey of the Polish "exile" to the West had all the features of the Grand Tour undertaken at that time by all the well born and artistically inclined. In Weimar, he paid homage to the eighty-year-old Goethe; in Rome, he met Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy; in Berlin, he heard one of Hegel's lectures (and was not impressed); in Bonn, he paid a visit to August Wilhelm Schlegel, the intellectual patron of German Romanticism.

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In Prague, he conferred with a group of Czech poets who were staging a revival of native Czech literature.

Finally Mickiewicz moved on to Rome, where his old friend Volkonskaya had just moved her court from Moscow. He soon knew almost everyone of note in Rome. He struck up a friendship with James Fenimore Cooper and quickly enlisted him as America's leading advocate of the Polish cause. His popularity was a bit of a mystery, because most of his admirers had to take his greatness on faith. The publication of his poetry in French translation in 1829 helped a little, but as Koropeckyj observes, for many of his new friends, "that this Pole wrote poetry mattered only insofar as this was part of his image, as was the fact that this poetry was, as they were made to understand, Romantic and in the language of what was perceived to be an unjustly beleaguered people."

In 1830, the people rose up yet again in Poland. This ill-fated uprising was brutally crushed a year later, and what was left of Poland was stripped of the last vestiges of autonomy. There followed decades of the systematic destruction of Polish identity and culture at the hands of Poland's occupiers. It was a devastating event that has etched itself forever in Polish memory. But Mickiewicz, already considered Poland's national bard, did not participate in it. His old friends in Lithuania were expecting him, and his poems were recited on the barricades—but the poet was nowhere to be found.

Mickiewicz had left Paris, where he was staying at that time, ostensibly with the intention to reach Poland, but his trip was strangely meandering and unhurried. He made detours, visited friends, and dallied until it was too late and he had to turn back, joining the stream of Polish refugees escaping to the West. Scholars still speculate about the poet's reluctance to take part in the national upheaval. Perhaps it was his loathing of any military action, and a premonition of its consequences. Shortly before the outbreak of the uprising, Mickiewicz wrote a poem that seemed to predict the course of events, and the price that the nation would have to pay. But such realism was unbecoming in the nation's leading Romantic. The experience must have scarred the poet with a sense of disappointment and failure that would linger throughout his life.

Hunkered down in Dresden, Mickiewicz started composing a Romantic drama—one of a series of plays begun back in Lithuania and connected by the motif of a pagan Belarussian ritual in honor of *dziady*, "the forefathers" or tribal ancestors, which was still being celebrated in Mickiewicz's times. *Forefathers' Eve*, Part Three, as the drama would be known, retells the story of the poet's imprisonment in Vilno. Locked in a cell in a Benedictine cloister, Mickiewicz's alter ego, a young poet named Konrad, rails against God's indifference to the suffering of innocent Polish youth. Claiming to be God's equal in creative genius and God's superior in compassion, the poet demands to partake in his omnipotence in order to set the world straight. Predictably, God remains silent, and the poet, tormented by demons, sinks into darkness.

Up to this point, Mickiewicz's hero resembles Goethe's Faust, Byron's Manfred, and scores of God-challengers in Romantic literature. But the Polish rebel cannot be allowed to go defiantly to hell. A humble Benedictine priest, Father Piotr, enters Konrad's cell, exorcises the demons, and leaves the poet seemingly reconciled with God. Yet the priest seems to be troubled by many of the same questions that had brought Konrad to the brink of damnation. When he falls asleep, he has a vision of Poland betrayed, tortured, and led to crucifixion—but unlike Konrad, he realizes that there is a higher purpose to God's seemingly cruel treatment of Poland. Just as God gave over His innocent son to suffering and death so that he could rise from the dead and wash away the sins of humanity, so has He now chosen the most innocent nation, the most truly Christian nation, to die and then rise "on the third day" in order to awaken the conscience of Europe and usher in a new era of Christianity. Poland, the Christ of nations! Its defeat is its triumph; its humiliation is its power and its glory.

Koropeckyj rightly points out that in *Forefathers' Eve*, Part Three, Mickiewicz not only created the classical Polish narrative of self-justification but also engineered his own transformation from a failed Romantic hero into a Romantic prophet mystically united with the nation in its sufferings and dreams. The role provided something of a moral alibi for him. His failure to join the actual uprising was of little significance, because in spirit he was there. His soul was one with the souls of the people; it fought and it died with them.

Mickiewicz was not quite the inventor of the doctrine known as "Polish messianism." The idea that Poland has a special spiritual mission among the nations of Europe had been present in Polish writing and philosophy for some time, and became especially prominent after the failure of the uprising in 1830. But it was Mickiewicz's version that became a strong and enduring national myth—especially since the poet, settled in Paris, soon developed it into a quasi-biblical story in two pieces of poetic prose called *The Books of the Polish Nation* and *The Books of Polish Pilgrimage*. These works tell the story of a second fall—the corruption and fragmentation of Christianity by power-hungry rulers culminating in the reign of the "satanic trinity," Frederick the Great of Prussia, Maria Theresa of Austria, and Catherine the Great of Russia. According to Mickiewicz, only Poland did not succumb to the general decline, preserving the true Christian spirit and turning away from the selfish material pursuits of other nations. For a time, therefore, it was rewarded with prosperity and free-

At the Autopsy of Vaslav Nijinsky

They sliced the soles of his feet
open, lengthwise then crosswise

to see if there was some trick,
an explanation

for the man who could fly,
the man who saw the godhead

with his naked eye.
They pinned the flaps of skin

open like wings
and searched inside the gristle

for a machine,
a motor and spring, the wheel

inside the bone, the reason
why.

He must have been playing
a trick on them all this time,

the wool pulled tight
over the collective cyclopic eye,

flashbulb-bright—
he must have, he must have

lied. But the foot was that
of a normal man

after all, after all that
and they sewed his foot together again.

BRIDGET LOWE

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dom, and its multinational domain was an example of true brotherhood among peoples. But the "satanic trinity," unable to bear such righteousness in their midst, dismembered Poland and buried it. And yet Poland did not really die. Its soul left its body and descended from the public sphere "into the homes of peoples suffering in slavery in our country and abroad, in order to know their suffering," and it is patiently waiting for the day of resurrection and triumph. *The Books*, translated into several languages, met with considerable resonance in Europe and were largely responsible for the elites' interest in the Polish cause. They were praised, among others, by Mazzini and by Carlyle, despite his skepticism about their mystical content.

The publication of *The Books* also marked just about the end of Mickiewicz as a poet. Settled in Paris, which was the center of the Polish émigré community, married with a growing family, he tried to continue his "forefathers" cycle, but with little success. Shortly before his marriage to a woman with whom he would eventually have six children, he managed to complete the charming and swashbuckling "national epic" *Master Thaddeus*, which he seemed to treat partly as a potboiler and partly as a diversion during one of his bouts of melancholy. He was approaching forty, the age at which most European Romantics were either silent or dead, and he seemed to be losing interest in poetry. Instead he devoted most of his time to spreading his messianic revelation in *The Polish Pilgrim*, the journal that he started in Paris, and studying the writings of various European mystics. He published a series of meditations titled *Apothegms and Sayings from the Works of Jacob Boehme*, Angelus Silesius, and Saint-Martin, and for several years he was a member of the Circle of God's Cause, a religious sect established by his Lithuanian countryman Andrzej Towiański.

Although he was preoccupied with Polish issues and spent most of his time among Polish expatriates, he did maintain contacts with French intellectuals. Encouraged by George Sand, he tried, with little success, to write plays in French, so as to augment his modest income from new editions of his poetry. The French literary critic Sainte-Beuve helped him to obtain a position as a professor of classical literature in Lausanne, Switzerland. But the real opportunity to influence Western minds seemed to open for him when he was offered a newly created chair in Slavic literatures at the Collège de France, where he soon became the close friend of two great and controversial French historians, Jules Michelet and Edgar Quinet.

In contrast to classical literature, in which Mickiewicz had solid academic training, his knowledge of Slavic writing was fragmentary at best, and his views were highly idiosyncratic. From the very beginning, it was obvious that his students could expect a lot of enthusiasm and inspiration but very little real scholarship. Mickiewicz's lectures were in fact literary improvisations, for which the poet prepared by listening to his wife play Mozart and pacing in his room well into the night. He delivered them without notes, switching from one subject to another and losing himself in endless digressions. He spun theories and grand generalizations, all delivered with great authority but with hardly any support in fact. They were "full of ideas, but by no means always clear," as one of his friends politely remarked.

Soon Mickiewicz was openly preaching his creed of Poland's unique role in the spiritual renewal of Europe. Speaking to an international audience, however, he had to tread carefully. Romanticism, after all, was a period of awakening nationalisms everywhere, and the concept of a unique Polish destiny had its equivalents in Germany, France, Italy, Russia, and scores of smaller European nations that were beginning to vie for independence from the Hapsburg, Romanov, and Ottoman empires. Aware that every nation is, to itself, a chosen nation, Mickiewicz quickly developed a theory that each people has its own particular role to play in the great historical progress toward universal peace and brotherhood of nations.

Not only Poland but all Slavs, owing to their spiritual purity and authentic faith, were predisposed to receive the word of God—including, it seemed, the Russians, with whom Mickiewicz remained fascinated even after the trauma of the 1830 uprising. The French—the nation of historical action and world-transforming passion—were also a chosen people, and their grand universal dream of united Europe almost became reality under Napoleon. Now, with the help of Poland and other Slavic nations, France was expected to understand "the divine aspect of [its] own history," and to challenge the legitimacy of the old dynastic power structure.

Then there was the original chosen nation, the Jews—"our elder brothers," as Mickiewicz used to call them after his master Towiański. (Centuries later the phrase was adopted by Pope John Paul II.) Mickiewicz had always displayed a strong, and for his times rather atypical, attachment to the Jews. They constituted about 10 percent of the population of the former Polish Commonwealth—about the same as the gentry, considered the core of the Polish nation; but they were all but invisible to the majority of Polish patriots and politicians of the time. Mickiewicz was one of the very few exceptions. On more than one occasion he stated that there could be no independent Poland without full rights for its Jewish population. In a draft of a constitution for Poland, he offered Jews "respect, brotherhood, assistance on the way to [their] eternal and terrestrial good, complete equality of rights."

One of the more interesting characters in *Master Thaddeus* is a patriotic Jewish innkeeper, apparently a member of an anti-Russian plot headed by a Polish priest. Mickiewicz was married to a Frankist Jewish woman, and toward the end of his life he developed a particularly close, almost paternal relationship with his Jewish secretary, Armand Levy. Witnesses say that he reacted with rage and revulsion whenever he heard someone denigrate the Jews in his presence, which gave rise to theories that he himself might have had Jewish blood. In his lectures, he maintained that centuries of suffering and oppression had endowed the Jews with particularly deep self-knowledge and spirituality, and that the radiance of Jewish wisdom would soon shine upon the whole world.

For a while, Mickiewicz's lectures enjoyed great success. They were reviewed in newspapers and talked about in literary salons. They even became a sort of tourist attraction: crowds gathered to hear the raving "poet from the North," ladies fainted, the audience responded with approval or protest. But eventually the fad began to pass, and the authorities—partly responding to academic criticism and partly concerned about the poet's increasingly radical religious and political ideas—decided to terminate his appointment in 1844. (They agreed to keep paying him half of his salary.) The next few years are probably the most enigmatic period in Mickiewicz's life. They seem to have been spent mainly in ministering to the charismatic Towiański's mystical sect, and acting as the master's surrogate after his expulsion from France. In the end, though, Mickiewicz decided that the master's teachings were too quietist for his purposes, and he left to form his own spiritual circle, advocating "greater engagement with the world, and with Poland above all."

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In 1848, the wave of political and national unrest known as the Spring of Nations rolled over Europe. Italian patriots were pushing for the unification of Italian states and challenging Austrian rule in the north. For Mickiewicz, the events inaugurated a period of hectic political activity. He hurried to Italy with the intention of forming a Polish legion to fight with the Italians against Austria. (He also might have been trying to meet up with another American friend, the transcendentalist writer Margaret Fuller, whom he met a year earlier in Paris.) Militarily speaking, the legion was a laughable matter: it consisted of a dozen or so Polish artists residing in Rome. But their triumphant march to the Austrian front—or rather, their trip in two carriages—proved Mickiewicz's uncanny gift for public relations. Wherever they went, the tiny detachment was preceded by enthusiastic press reports and greeted by crowds. After Mickiewicz's departure—once again, he had no intention of joining the fight himself—the group grew to about one hundred men and took part in some military operations a few days before the Italians signed an armistice with the Austrians.

Back in Paris, Mickiewicz, with a group of Polish and French collaborators, started a French-language newspaper called *La Tribune des Peuples*. It opened its pages to a group of international, mostly leftist contributors who were reporting on liberation movements throughout Europe. In June 1849, the police of Louis Napoleon, the nephew of Mickiewicz's beloved emperor, raided the offices of the paper and arrested some of its staff. Mickiewicz had to go into hiding for a while. Later the publication was re-opened, but all its Polish editors had to leave, and it collapsed soon afterwards.

At the outbreak of the Crimean War, the poet managed to have himself sent by a group of influential Poles to Constantinople, on a mission to assist in the formation of yet another legion, this time made of Cossack and Polish prisoners of war and deserters from the Russian army willing to fight on the side of the anti-Russian alliance. Discovering a fair number of Jews among the volunteers, Mickiewicz and Levy conceived of an idea to form a separate Jewish brigade that would fight against Poland's oppressors and advance the Polish cause. What would be more beautiful, after all, than proud "Hussars of Israel" marching one day into independent Poland side by side with their Polish comrades-in-arms?

We will never know what might have come of this crazy but inspired idea, because in Constantinople Mickiewicz's life came to an abrupt end. On the night of November 24, 1855, the poet suddenly felt weak. A clumsy attempt by a friend to escort him to the bathroom resulted in a bad fall and a fractured skull. Two days later he was dead. The cause of his collapse was probably an onslaught of cholera, but rumors of a poisoning immediately started to spread—during the years of his notorious, often divisive activity in Paris, the poet made some powerful enemies in the Polish exile community. Many observed that his end eerily resembled that of the idol of his youth, Byron, who died under similarly mysterious circumstances in Greece.

To an Old Man Dying

(for Lucien)

"I'm coming back as a sea lion," he said,
"To traverse the seven seas.
I'll swim from Norway to the Coast of Japan,
Or not, whichever I please."

"But how will I know you?" she asked, distressed.
"All sea lions look alike."
"I'll wear a gold candle that burns on my head,
And eye-glitter green as a pike."

"I'm coming back as a lichen," he said.
"To cling to an oak's northern side.
I'll contemplate life without saying a word,
And day after day abide."

"I'm coming back as an osprey," he said.
"I've hit on my ultimate wish.
Where all there's to do is hang on the wind,
And fly and fuck and fish."

"If you come back as a lichen," she said,
"I'll know which blossom is you.
I'll scrape you screaming off the soggy bark
And boil you in my stew.

If I find you've returned as some ear-piercing bird,
I'll get out my trusty bow,
And the first time you soar past, you son of a bitch,
An arrow will bring you low."

"For sharing the ache," and she grabbed his lapel,
"The choices have narrowed to two.
Either come back as me with a hole in my gut,
Or simply come back as you."

BRUCE DUCKER

In his lifetime Mickiewicz was a highly controversial figure. His writings, his "prophesies," and his various activities in émigré circles met with enthusiasm, but also with vitriolic attacks. His transformation into a national icon took place a few decades after his death, when Romanticism as a literary movement was largely a thing of the past. The metamorphosis was completed in 1890, when the poet's remains were moved from Paris to Kraków and welcomed by crowds, who laid him to rest in the royal crypt of the Kraków cathedral, next to a whole pantheon of Polish kings.

It was probably yet another Polish uprising—even more desperate and tragic than the previous one—that played the main role in this process of cultural beatification. Begun in 1863 as a spontaneous protest against conscription into the Russian army, this revolt was conducted mostly by ill-trained and poorly armed guerrillas that stood no chance against Russian regular forces. As Koropeckyj rightly observes, it was in fact a product of the Romantic disregard for reality, "the work of a generation brought up on the ideals of the Great Emigration, on Romantic poetry, messianism, conspiracies, and a concomitant willingness to sacrifice blood, if only for the sake of demonstrating the will to exist." After its disastrous end, which was followed by public executions and the harshest repression that Poles had ever experienced, the nation's elites seemed finally to abandon Romantic dreams in favor of more pragmatic, "organic" programs—improving education and living conditions, promoting business, raising the standard of living of the Polish peasant masses. But national independence remained the implicit goal of all these activities, and Mickiewicz's messianic myth seemed a perfect tool to keep this goal alive—a form of reassurance that, despite all that it had endured, Poland still existed, if only in a purely spiritual and idealized form.

In the decades between the last "Romantic" uprising and Poland's independence in 1918, the unwritten strategy of Polish survival rested on two complementary principles: on the surface, a realistic accommodation to prevailing conditions, and beneath the surface a contest of spirit and will in which, in Koropeckyj's words, "cultural artifacts, perforce,

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functioned as simulacra for national institutions." The figure of Adam Mickiewicz, domesticated and purged of its more controversial or eccentric aspects, served, as Koropeckyj remarks, "as a constant point of reference—the nation's *wieszcz*, the first and the greatest, whose life and works at once shaped and embodied the ethos of modern Poland."

As a political symbol, too, Mickiewicz proved to be unusually versatile. Over the years, practically all political factions have claimed him as their patron by subtly manipulating his image. Christian conservatives claimed him, despite his declared anti-clericalism and his "heretical" religious views; liberal democrats claimed him, despite the fact that he looked at parliamentary democracy with disdain; Polish nationalists claimed him, despite his open and inclusive concept of the nation; and even communists claimed him, naming their party organ *The Tribune of the People*, in homage to his *La Tribune des Peuples*. Instead of one Mickiewicz, the history of Polish literature seems to be peopled by a horde of squabbling Mickiewiczes—a measure of the fact that no group or faction in Polish public life can afford to ignore or reject his legacy.

In a sense, Mickiewicz fulfilled the dream of many Romantic poets who claimed prophetic authority for their art. In his lifetime, he was Emerson's "fervent mystic, prophesying, half insane under the infinitude of his thought." After his death, he became Shelley's "legislator of the World," at least of the Polish world. His impact on the Polish mind may have been greater than that of the bards of other nations. But has it been for the good?

Much of modern Polish literature may be interpreted as a debate about Mickiewicz. "We all stem from him," the statement by one of his disciples about Mickiewicz's death, has long had a double meaning in Polish literary life. Some take it as an obligation to cultivate the root, others as an injunction to cut it off in search of one's own authentic voice. Witold Gombrowicz, who often mocked Polish national myths and affectations, is perhaps the finest example of the latter attitude. *Ferdydurke*, his best-known novel, includes a merciless screed against Polish Romantic pieties, and in his *Diary* he openly blames Mickiewicz for making Poles fall in love with a comfortable but totally false image of themselves.

Czesław Miłosz, on the other hand, openly acknowledged his debt to Mickiewicz and the Romantic tradition. Some of his poems, such as the famous "You Who Wronged," are so steeped in Romantic language and imagery that they might almost have been written by Mickiewicz. Miłosz often marveled at the childishness of Mickiewicz's beliefs, but in *The Land of Ulro* he placed Mickiewicz among the great Romantic minds—Blake and Goethe being his favorite examples—that struggled to close the widening gap between "the world of scientific laws—cold, indifferent to human values—and man's inner world." According to Miłosz, Mickiewicz was one of the defenders of the spirit in the increasingly spiritless world of modernity—a writer who tried to resolve the dangerous opposition between the new sense of human insignificance in the world and the urge, "born of wounded pride," to endow man with god-like pre-eminence. It is thanks to Mickiewicz, argued Miłosz, that Polish literature escaped most of the nihilistic tendencies of modernity and maintained a strong interest in metaphysics.

But surely it is time, at this late hour, to retire the sacred nonsense about Poland as the chosen nation, the endlessly martyred, endlessly self-scarifying, and endlessly untainted victim. Many Poles seem still to believe this myth and to live quite contentedly with its grotesque implications—for example, the belief in Poland's absolute historical innocence, which makes otherwise reasonable people talk about "slander" whenever someone quotes this or that less illustrious (or downright obscene) event from Polish history, or suggests that other nations might have suffered as much, or even more, than the Poles. Following Gombrowicz's example, one wants to call on one's fellow Poles to grow up, or at least face their immaturity, and stop babbling on about national destinies, spirits, signs, and miracles.

But then one goes back to Mickiewicz—and one is seduced again. The myth proves surprisingly durable and, in Miłosz's words, "strong enough to consume all who would resist it—horse, armor, and all." And so it returns, generation after generation, in times of crisis and terror, compelling people to repeat the cycle of sacrifice and redemption, despair and hope. I am thinking of my late father, a man not given to Romantic raptures, a man with an exacting scientific mind and little patience for poetry, a Protestant in Catholic Poland, whose underlined copy of Mickiewicz I keep on my bookshelf. It is said that during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 he performed acts of courage that could hardly have been expected from such a quiet, seemingly timid man. My father knew from the outset that the uprising was going to fail, that it would end in slaughter, but he said that he and his colleagues felt it imperative to participate, and even believed in some sort of miracle. And it was a sort of a miracle that he, one of very few from his unit, survived the hecatomb.

Writing in Kraków right after the end of that war, Miłosz remembered—in his poem "A Nation"—"the purest of nations on earth when it's judged by a flash of lightning," a nation that is "ready to offer their lives to draw Heaven's wrath on their foes," but also a nation "thoughtless and sly in everyday toil," and "stealing a crust of bread from a child's hand." The poem ends with something that sounds like an endorsement of Mickiewicz's dream, precisely on the grounds that it is probably unattainable: "A man of that nation, standing by his son's cradle, / Repeats words of hope, always, till now, in vain."

In 1980, during the dangerous heyday of Solidarity, Miłosz's poem "You Who Wronged" was inscribed on the monument to the Gdańsk shipyard workers who fell in the riots ten years earlier. Several months later, martial law was declared and Solidarity as a political movement was all but destroyed. But Solidarity was also a kind of messianic religious movement, which survived, just as Mickiewicz had predicted, in the homes of people "suffering in slavery." Then, at last, came the crisis of communism, followed by a geopolitical shift, and unexpectedly the whole Cold War arrangement was over. That was history, of course—a set of objective circumstances and nothing else. But events of such magnitude always seem to call for a mythical reading. Sometimes the poets are not far behind the statesmen, and sometimes they even precede them. I am sure that many in Poland experienced the fall of communism as something written by a *wieszcz*: the third day had passed, the stone was removed, a Romantic prophecy was fulfilled in the miraculous year 1989. ◆

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Washington Diarist

The Idea of Ideas

What is an idea? Any notion in a person's mind, obviously: an image, a concept, a memory, a desire—"whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking," as Locke said. But this level of generality, however necessary it was for the rise of epistemology, is hardly the end of it. All people think, but all people are not thinkers. Since the dawn of thought about thinking, ideas have been classified and ranked according to various kinds, not least with the aim of ascertaining which among them can be raised above the swim of subjectivity and secured by the more obligating authority of reason. Some philosophers went so far in their ambition for ideas that they divinized some of them, imagining that they exist, as gorgeous unchanging forms, in an empyrean of their own. Leave aside the mysticism: the insistence upon establishing a hierarchy of mental representations is right. There are higher and lower, bigger and smaller, more significant and less significant, more rigorous and less rigorous ideas. An individual may be known by his idea of ideas, and a culture, too.

"Ideas were, are, and always will be the next big thing," Richard Stengel wrote pantingly in his editor's letter in *Time*'s "third annual 10 Ideas issue," published last month. (What a damning admission, to announce an annual special ideas issue.) His assumption that the next big thing is what we most desperately need to know is itself an idea to which some analytical pressure must be applied, but it nicely captures the spirit of the love of ideas in contemporary America. "Conceptual scoops," Stengel calls the ideas in his issue. Most of them are just pop futurology, fantasies about this and that generated by bits of data about this and that: "TV will save the world," or "The twilight of the elites," or "The future of work looks a lot like unemployment." Bracing stuff. The latter scoop was articulated in one of the most imbecilic articles I have ever read: "Rather than warehouse their children in factory schools invented to instill obedience in the future mill workers of America, bourgeois rebels will educate their kids in virtual schools tailored to different learning styles." That is not an idea, it is an invitation to child protective services. Also, "The cultural battle lines of our time, with red America pitted against blue, will be scrambled as Buddhist vegan militia members and evangelical anarchist squatters trade tips on how to build self-sufficient vertical farms from scrap-heap materials." This "idea," the bastard child of Philip K. Dick and Mark Penn, is not only obscure, it is also a fine illustration of the way in which ideas these days are frequently little more than a pundit's hot mix of slogans and stereotypes. In this circus of ideas, as in every circus, what counts most is novelty. In our fresh thinking, the fresh is more important than the thinking.

The New York Times Magazine also has an "annual year in ideas" issue, which appeared last winter. Some of its ideas were just news of the weird, such as "music for monkeys" or "cows with names make more milk"; but most of them were cute little inventions or discoveries—ethical robots ("Imagine robots that obey injunctions like Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative"), and bicycle highways, and lithium in the water supply, and the kitchen sink that puts out fires. Whatever all this is, it is not the life of the mind. Or more precisely, it is the life of the mind conceived pragmatically. These are indeed the archetypal ideas for a society in which the most important question to be asked about a proposition is not whether it is true or false, or good or bad, or right or wrong, but whether it will work—a society in which a checklist can be mistaken for a manifesto. Pragmatism is also an idea, of course: the big idea of small ideas, of ideas as directions and instructions, like the arrowed drawings in Ikea boxes.

This impoverishment of our idea of ideas—our satisfaction with what Owen Barfield witheringly described as "dashboard knowledge"—may be attributed to the new prestige, even the new tyranny, of the social sciences. You may have noticed that the digital age is the golden age of data; and intellectuals everywhere seem to have fallen under the spell of e-positivism. In American journalism, the most comic representative of the cult of "new research" and "recent studies" is David Brooks and his tiny empirical sentences. My recent favorite was his freakonomical discussion of Sandra Bullock's predicament, in which he comfortingly noted that "research by Donald A. Redelmeier and Sheldon M. Singh has found that, on average, Oscar winners live nearly four years longer than nominees that don't win." The Redelmeier-Singh hypothesis! This "science" is related to the rise of behavioral economics, which looks to me like an unfortunate expansion of utilitarianism. Bentham was at least dead to questions of sensibility; but the behavioral economists are confident that they can quantify those questions, and thereby disguise an old and narrow interest in the outcomes of decisions by consumers and investors with a new and broad interest in the mysteries of the human psyche. But you do not honor those mysteries with econometric expressions. Here, from a recent paper in the catchfire field of "happiness studies," is an example:

$$\text{Happiness}_{it}^{*} = \boldsymbol{x}_{it}\boldsymbol{\beta}_{t} + \sqrt{x_{it}\gamma_{t}}\varepsilon_{it},$$

I do not pretend to be able to read such notation. I confess to a certain philistinism about all this. But my conscience is less troubled when I consider the philistinism of the equation-makers in their treatment of realms of human experience in which their methods have no place, their contempt for the deep and hard-won distinction between explanation and understanding in the analysis of human affairs. I find their regressions regressive. They owe their ascendancy to the reduced intellectual aspirations of their society. I do not mean to say that the only ideas are philosophical ones; but I half-mean to say so. I miss the days when our public disputations were torn between Marx and Burke; when people believed *in* as much as they believed *that*; when we had battles of ideas and not festivals of ideas. And I worry that it is only the liberals who have moved into the natty minimalist and instrumentalist universe. The Tea Party is thinking big.

Leon Wieseltier

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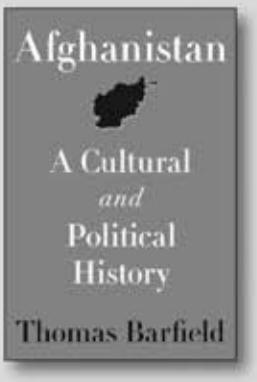

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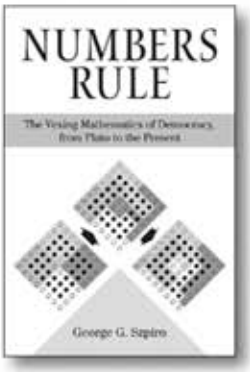

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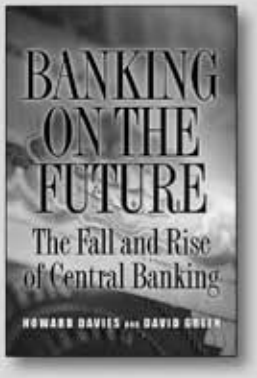

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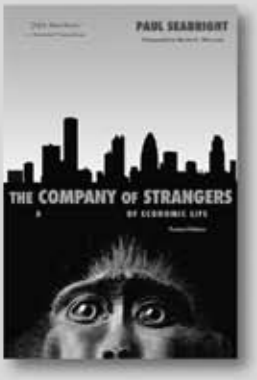

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